Tip Cat

by the author of

"Miss Toosey's Mission" and "Laddie"

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TIP CAT.

"He had a long, untrimmed, gray moustache, and deep-set eyes of a light color unusual with such a dark complexion, which gave a sort of wolfish expression to his face, strangely repeated in the face of the big, rough, surly-looking sheep-dog at his heels." — PAGE 93.

TIP CAT.

Evelyn. Whitaker

BY THE AUTHOR OF

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TIP CAT.

CHAPTER I.

"THE POOR, OLD GRANDFATHER!"

WHEN there was a funeral at a house on the other side of the street, Letty and Sybil were allowed to stand at the nursery window, and watch all that went on, though nurse would not allow them to have the window open and to lean out, as she and Martha did, to see it turn the corner into the square, but the children saw a good deal, and, for weeks after, funerals was their favorite game, and they even persuaded nurse to dress the doll Sybil had on her birthday as a widow.

So it seemed very hard to the children that when there was a funeral at their own house, the nursery blinds were kept closely drawn down, and they were

not allowed to raise even one little corner to peep out, though they heard nurse telling Martha that it was the finest funeral there had been for years, and though she and Martha disappeared into the night nursery, and locked the door, and Letty and Sybil were almost sure that they were having a look themselves, though they would not allow the chlldren to do so.

It was the children's grandfather who died, and nurse said they were very 'eartless because they did not cry when she told them he was dead, though she sniffed a good deal herself behind the corner of her apron, and gave them each a clean pocket-handkerchief for the same purpose; and Letty and Sybil both tried their best, and thought of the doll he had given them, and of the grapes he put on their plate when they came down to dessert; but though they blinked their eyes very hard, they kept quite dry, and just then the kitten jumped up at nurse's apron string and made them laugh, and nurse said they were 'eartless; and when she went on to tell them that Mr. Dick was coming home, it was no use the children trying to look sad any longer, and it was as much as they could do to resist dancing round the room. Dick was their own brother, and quite grown up, but not grown

up dull like most people; he was not too old to enjoy a game of blind man's buff, or feeding the ducks in the Serpentine, or a long afternoon in the Zoological Gardens with a really satisfactory time devoted to the monkeys; and it was not only just to please the children, with a sort of kind, patient endurance, like most grown up people, which spoils half the pleasure, but because he liked it himself; and when he took them to the Pantomime he always took three seats in a row, and sat between his two little sisters, so that they should all see just the same; and he laughed quite as much and much louder than either of them, instead of putting the little ones in front and retiring to the back of the box, and yawning like Uncle Tom.

Dick was at Oxford when his grandfather died, and they telegraphed for him to come at once. Old Mr. Lucas died very suddenly. He seemed quite well when he came in to dinner, and Letty and Sybil had their white frocks put on, and went down to dessert as usual; and they did not notice that he was silent, for he always was so, and the little girls never remembered on any occasion his saying more to them than, "Good girl, good girl!" and patting them on the head, as if he were thinking of anything in the world except his little granddaughters. Sybil

fancied that he said, "bless you," as she kissed his gray whisker, but Letty did not hear him.

He went into the library behind the dining-room after dinner, as he generally did when he was alone, and had his coffee taken to him there, and when Jenkins went in to ask if he wanted anything more, he was writing letters at the table, and there they found him next morning, dead, and his head had fallen forward on to a letter he had just begun to Dick. "My dear Dick," and that was all.

Dick always kept that blotted sheet among his most precious possessions, and when people said that the old man had dealt unfairly with him and the little girls, and blamed him, and it was hard to find an answer for them in a very sore heart, Dick would get out the paper and look at it with tears in his eyes and say, "Poor old fellow, he meant to set it right; it wasn't his fault."

The old grandfather was certainly very fond of Dick, though he was nearly as silent with him as he was with the little girls; but Dick was used to him, and would chatter away to him about his school life and the fun he had, and the friends, and the fights, and the mischief, without being discouraged by only receiving a grunt or an absent, preoccupied look for

all response. And Dick was very fond of him ; the boy had been sent home from India when he was quite a baby, so the dull, old house in Bedford Place had been the only home he had ever known, and the silent, grave, old grandfather had taken the place of his parents, for long letters on foreign paper cannot replace daily intercourse, however kind and loving they may be. Dick was quite a big boy when Letty and Sybil came home to England, and he was just going to leave school. Four little baby brothers had been born between Dick and Letty, but they had all died, and the poor mother kept the two little girls with her as long as she dared, and it nearly broke her heart parting from them, and the children will never forget how she looked when she said, "Good-bye, my darlings ; love one another, and be good to grandpapa and brother Dick till I come home."

It was only six months afterwards that the news came that both Colonel and Mrs. Lucas had died of cholera, Dick told the little girls. He came up into the nursery and took them on his knees and put his arms round them, and they each rested her head on his shoulder. They were very little then and did not understand, it was all so strange ; and they did not cry, for Dick said that father and mother

were not farther off, for heaven was nearer than India.

"But, Dick," Letty said, wistfully, "they won't ever come home now?"

"They've gone home," he answered; "and we'll go home too, some day."

The only people who did not like Dick were Uncle Tom and Aunt Maria. Uncle Tom was Colonel Lucas's younger brother, and he had always been the steady, hard-working, industrious one; and, while the Colonel was extravagant and reckless and wild, and got into debt over and over again, Uncle Tom was always quiet and well-behaved and never gave old Mr. Lucas any trouble, and married Aunt Maria, who was a good deal older than himself and had a large fortune. Uncle Tom had been a partner in the bank for some years, and was very well off, and had a very elegant house in Regent's Park and two little girls, whom Letty and Sybil cordially disliked, as they were very prim and well-behaved, and were constantly held up as examples of lady-like conduct by nurse and Martha. But as Uncle Tom was so rich and comfortable, it seemed very strange that he should have been so displeased when his father offered to have Dick to live with

him, for the Colonel had very little money, and had married a wife without a penny, though she was beautiful and good. But nevertheless Uncle Tom seemed to grudge every penny that was spent on the boy's education, and he was quite angry at the idea of his being sent to Oxford. He never ventured to say anything to the old man about it, but he showed what he felt to Dick plainly enough, and nothing made him so furious as when any one spoke of Dick as his grandfather's heir.

But to go back to the day that the old man died. Dick was telegraphed for; but as he was away from Oxford that day, he did not get the message till the afternoon, and it was quite the evening before he came into the nursery with such a real look of sorrow in his face that the children were 'eartless no longer, but ran to him crying and clung round his neck sobbing. They had never seen any one grown up cry before, for their mother's tears at parting had been hidden away under smiles that were a hundred times more sad, and as for nurse's sniffing behind her apron, they were not taken in by that; but the little choke in Dick's voice as he said, "The poor, old grandfather," touched the hearts that nurse had thought so very hard and unfeeling.

They sat all cuddled up together in the rocking chair, just as they had done when the news came from India that their father and mother had gone home, only the arms that clung round Dick's neck were longer, and there was down on the cheeks against which the children's pressed.

Uncle Tom had come in the morning, and had stood by the nursery table, where Letty and Sybil had been arranging the Noah's Ark animals in pairs to follow the funeral of one of the elephants, whom nurse had stepped on and fatally injured in the morning. He leant his hands on the table and kept swaying backwards and forwards, and the children were so afraid that he would upset the giraffes, who were very unsteady on their feet, that they did not pay much attention to what he said about afflictive dispensations and decrees of Providence.

In the afternoon Aunt Maria arrived, and was present when the milliner came to take orders for the mourning, much to nurse's irritation. It was as much as either nurse or the milliner could do to answer civilly when Aunt Maria insisted on moderation in the depth of crape and the quality of paramatta, when, as nurse remarked in an aside to the milliner, "It's the poor little dears' own Gran'pa,

and made of money!" to which the milliner replied, with a sigh, "Yes, poor dear gentleman."

But though nurse managed to restrain her feelings in the nursery, it was a different matter when Aunt Maria went downstairs to speak about the servants' mourning, and there was a regular scene with Mrs. Treasure, the cook-housekeeper, who had ruled supreme for twenty years, and knew to a halfpenny the amount that propriety demanded should be spent on servants' mourning in well-regulated establishments. This was not the first time that she and Aunt Maria had had a battle royal, as that lady had felt herself called upon, more than once, to enter a protest against the reckless extravagance that ruled in the kitchen in Bedford Place, but had, on each occasion, been obliged to retire before Mrs. Treasure's determined front; and when she appealed to the master of the house, a very absent-minded grunt was all she got out of him after nearly half an hour's solemn accusation, and only Dick, who was present on the occasion, saw a little twinkle in the old man's eye when the discomfited lady took her departure, which showed that he had not been altogether so inattentive as Aunt Maria had thought.

To-day, however, Mrs. Treasure was not so entire-

ly self-possessed as on former occasions, so that she did not reply to Mrs. Tom Lucas with the "Yes, mum," "No, mum," "Really, mum," which were almost as inscrutable and irritating as her master's grunts. She had been really overcome by the sudden death of her old master, whom she had served faithfully according to her lights, at any rate not allowing any one else to rob him, and you might, as the children heard her tell nurse, have knocked her down with a feather, which expression impressed them strongly, as Mrs. Treasure was a very substantial person, standing peculiarly square and firm on her feet. So, on this occasion, she forgot herself and the character she was bound to keep up before "the gals," who were listening giggling behind the pantry door, and she gave Aunt Maria a piece of her mind, and told her that now the old master was gone, they looked to Mr. Dick as their master, and they "wouldn't stand any interference, were it ever so," at which Aunt Maria turned a pale green, and swept out of the kitchen with as much dignity as she could command, leaving Mrs. Treasure to subside into hysterics on one of the kitchen chairs, which lasted so long, and required such constant attention from her sympathising fellow-servants, with smelling-salts and

burnt feathers, and patting the palms of her hands, and applying water outwardly and peppermint inwardly to bring her to, that nurse and Martha were both called down to help in the difficult process of restoration, and that was how it was that Letty and Sybil were alone in the nursery when Dick came in.

I think it was the news of his arrival that ultimately roused Mrs. Treasure, and nothing would do but that she must prepare dinner for him with her own hands. "As sha'n't feel no difference if I can help it, and always liked curry from a child, bless him!" Jenkins too bustled about, fetching up choice wine from the cellar and laying the dinner with its usual pompous accessories of solid plate and old-fashioned cut glass in the gloomy dining-room, where evening after evening the old grandfather had dined by himself in solitary state.

But Dick sat with the children in the nursery, only lighted by the big, blazing fire, which shone on the robins on the wall-paper and the colored pictures from the *Illustrated* pinned on the walls, and on the doll's house in the corner, with Noah's ark standing on the top of it, and by and by, when Martha came running up to put on the kettle for tea—for tea time had been quite forgotten in the prevailing ex-

citement in the house—Dick asked them to bring his dinner up there, and he and the children had quite a merry tea dinner after all, when their eyes were dried; for Dick did not seem to think it wrong to laugh, or expect every one to speak very low, and sigh at the end of each sentence, as nurse did.

CHAPTER II.

READING THE WILL.

During the four days that passed after their grandfather's death and before the funeral, the children saw very little of Dick. There was a great deal to be arranged, and every one turned to Dick for directions. Mr. Murchison, the lawyer, was there every day with Dick and Uncle Tom, looking through the papers in the library. Mr. Murchison was an old friend of Mr. Lucas's, and used often to come and dine with him, and he was fond of Dick and kind to the little girls, for whom he brought little, oblong, wooden boxes of rose lozenges, and whom he had now and then to tea in his chambers in Bedford Row.

But this week the children thought he was not at all nice or pleasant, when by chance they came across him, for he hardly took any notice of them,

and would not look at a gutta-percha face they had bought, just because it was like one of his clerks. He seemed in a great fuss and anxiety, and Dick too got to look troubled, though he did not tell the little girls the reason when he came, as he always did, into the nursery in the evening. But servants always know what is going on in a house in some mysterious way, without intentional prying or eavesdropping, and it was soon generally known in the house that old Mr. Lucas's will could not be found, and that unless it was, all the money would go to Uncle Tom, and Dick would have nothing.

Though Letty and Sybil heard nurse talking about it, they did not at all understand what it would mean to them and Dick, but they felt the relief when, the day before the funeral, they heard the library door open and Mr. Murchison's voice raised in much more cheerful tones than it had been, and Dick's answering in the same key.

The nursery door was open and the house so quiet that the children could hear quite plainly what they said.

"Well, that's a comfort! I began to think it might have been destroyed, which would have been a mighty bad job for you, Master Dick. That's your

grandfather all over, a good man of business as ever lived, poor fellow; fastened up and dated and docketed 'My last Will and Testament.' Oh, I know well enough all about it, for I drew it myself. I'll call in on my way to the office and tell Mr. Tom that it's come to hand."

And then Dick came springing upstairs, three steps at a time, with a slackening of pace as he passed the door of that silent room, and came into the nursery with his face beaming free of all the trouble that had gathered there before.

"It's all right," he said, "it's found," as if he had told the little girls all about the missing will, and the search for it; and they did not pretend not to understand, but were as glad as he was about it.

Dick talked more that evening than he had ever done before of what he meant to do. The children had imagined that Dick would step at once into grandfather's place, and live always in Bedford Place, and go every day to the bank, only not stop there so long as grandfather, but come in soon enough to take them out. They had made up their minds that they would dine late every day with Dick, and that most likely they should go once a week at least, if not every day, to the pantomime, and quite as often to

the Zoological Gardens. So they were a little disappointed when he said that he should go back to Oxford, perhaps as soon as next week, and that he thought he should try and find some place in the country where Letty and Sybil could go with nurse and Martha, and where he could come whenever he could get away, for he would not be parted for long together from his little sisters ; and when Oxford was done with, and he came back to London and was called to the Bar, they should all live together again, and Letty and Sybil should keep house for brother Dick.

It did not quite satisfy the children's minds, as it was too far in the future, and Dick also mentioned governesses and masters as part of the programme ; but when they had arranged some of the details of the future establishment, and had settled that Letty should have the keys because she was the eldest, but that they should take it by turns to pour out Dick's coffee and sit at the end of the table, and that they would not both go out with him always, because it was nicer going in a hansom than a four-wheeler, the prospect grew very attractive and did not seem so very distant after all.

Next day was the funeral, and, as I have said,

Letty and Sybil were not allowed to watch it from the nursery windows, nor to open the nursery door and look over the banisters to catch a glimpse of anything passing below. Uncle Tom and Dick were the chief mourners, and there were some cousins and nephews of the old man, and some old friends and the doctor, and Mr. Murchison.

There seemed a smell everywhere of black kid gloves and crape, and the little girls sat up very stiff in their black frocks, which, in spite of Aunt Maria's injunctions of moderation, displayed as deep a woe as crape could express, and were so stiff and rough to the hands and round the throat that they certainly did not represent the luxury of woe.

After the funeral had been gone about half an hour, and when it was too late to see anything of it, the blinds were drawn up in all the rooms, making everything look coarse and glaring after the subdued half-light they had been seen in during the last few days.

The children were hungry, and as they heard symptoms of luncheon being laid in the dining-room, and nurse was out of the way, they thought they would go for a voyage of discovery. The door of their grandfather's room was open, and they stopped

and looked in. Dick had done all he could to prevent the children having an unreasonable terror of death, and nurse had done all she could to give them that terror; and they took hold of each other's hands as they looked in with a sort of awe. They had often been in there before in the old man's life time, when he was not there, and now it was just the same as it had always been: all the furniture unaltered and in the same places, and yet the room looked empty, as it had never looked before, and the children ran on with a wish to escape from the emptiness that only death can leave, and to be nearer the life that sounded from below with the cheerful clinking of glass and china, and opening doors and brisk footsteps.

But they had only just reached the dining-room, and had only given one rapid survey of the table, and had not had time to help themselves even to one of the little, round dinner-rolls perched on the top of each of the mitre-shaped dinner-napkins, when a cab drove up to the door, and Aunt Maria's face appearing at the cab window sent them hurrying upstairs again and past the open, empty room without a thought of its awfulness.

So they had to wait patiently till nurse brought up

their dinner, and told them that luncheon was going on in the dining-room, and that when it was over the will was to be read in the library.

"Shall we go down?" asked Letty; but nurse shook her head and said that little girls were not wanted on such occasions. But she was wrong, for the little girls had only just said their grace and taken off their pinafores, when Dick came up to fetch them, and they went down, each holding one of his hands, which made it rather a squeeze to get down stairs.

He was looking a little bit vexed and worried. Some of the nephews and cousins who came to the funeral were poor, and could not help, poor souls, feeling a little envious of Dick, with whom life seemed going so much more smoothly than it ever had done with them, and now and then through luncheon, a word or a look would show what they felt, and wounded Dick's kind, gentle heart that would have made the whole world rich and happy and good if he could.

In the library they were all assembled when Dick and his little sisters came in. There was another lady present beside Aunt Maria. A niece of old Mr. Lucas, a depressed, rather mouldy-looking widow, who sniffed at any pause in the conversa-

tion and echoed all Aunt Maria's opinions almost before she had heard what they were. Aunt Maria sat very upright in an arm-chair, and beckoned to the children to come to her when they came in ; but they pretended not to see her signal, but followed Dick to his chair rather behind Mr. Murchison, who sat up to the table with some papers before him. Mrs. Treasure and Jenkins were also there, Mrs. Treasure resplendent in creaking mourning, with her handkerchief in her hand and with eyes that carefully avoided Aunt Maria, though she sat directly opposite. Uncle Tom sat on the other side of Mr. Murchison, looking rather sulky, and as the children looked from one face to another of the assembled company, they all appeared to them cross, or dull, or tired, or sad, all except Dick, who smiled and put his arms round his little sisters as they stood on either side of him, while Mr. Murchison, after a few remarks, began with slow, precise fingers to break the seals of the paper in his hand and untie the red tape with which it was fastened.

"Our old friend," he said, "was always a good man of business, a capital man of business, the order and arrangement of his papers might really be an example to many of us, eh, master Dick ? And when he gave me instructions for the will, by Jove, sir, a

lawyer himself could not have done it better, though I say it. To be sure it was simple enough, but he had thought of everything, and nothing, had escaped his memory. It was really quite a treat to do business with such a man." And here Mr. Murchison drew the paper out of the covering and began unfolding the sheet of foolscap, with a little glance round at the attentive faces whose eyes watched every movement. "He was certainly the best man of bus——," and here he suddenly stopped, and his mouth dropped open with a jerk, and his eyebrows rose, giving his eyes, for once, a chance of looking out, without being obscured by shaggy, grey hair, which they did, though his double eye-glasses fell from the bridge of his nose with a resounding thud on the paper which made every one start. And then he got up from his chair and settled his eye-glasses again on his nose with a hand that trembled, and he turned to the window as if to get more light on the subject. There was not much light to be sure in the room, but there was too much on the foolscap paper to allow any doubt even for a second. There was no signature to the will.

It was Dick who said it first, his arms tightened round his little sisters for a moment and then he spoke, "It is not signed."

There was a moment's silence and then a voice from the other side of the room said, "Then it is worth nothing." It was Aunt Maria, and Mrs. Bush, the depressed widow, hastened to echo the words, "Then it is worth——" but was frightened into silence by the glare with which Mr. Murchison turned round on her.

Then he went back to that useless examination turning and twisting the paper as if he did not know (who better ?) that without the signature the will was not worth the paper it was written on. There was the sort of silence just then which people describe as one in which you could hear a pin drop, but Dick broke it. He put Letty and Sybil gently away from him and stood up, and his face was very white and did not look as young as it had done a minute ago, and his voice was a little husky.

"Of course," he said, "it is worth nothing if it is not signed, and we must ask Mr. Murchison to read the other will, which will hold good now."

But Mr. Murchison could not take it as calmly as Dick appeared to do ; any one to look at him might have thought that it was he who had lost a large inheritance for want of a few shaky lines of an old man's writing.

"It's a mistake," he said, "the most extraordinary mistake I ever knew in my life. Mr. Tom, I never thought your father was failing in mind before, but he must have been. And to think that he should have kept the old will when he knew as well as I do that it was waste paper as soon as another was made. Oh, what fools people are!" the old lawyer burst out, flinging down the unsigned will and running his fingers through his gray hair as if he would tear it out.

Uncle Tom sat rubbing one fat hand over the other and staring vacantly before him with his mouth in a whistling position, while the eyes of all the others were fixed on the lawyer with various expressions.

Dick had sat down again, and his hands, which the children held, were cold, and his lips dry, but he said, "We had better hear the old will, sir."

The old will had been found pushed away in a pigeon-hole in the library, with some old diaries and letters of no value except as recalling old times; it was discolored and dirty, and there was a splash of ink on the back, and the ink had grown pale in the twenty-two years that had passed since it was written.

Mr. Murchison had drawn that too, and remem-

bered the time well, before Dick was born and when the old man had just paid off Captain Lucas's debts for the third time, and declared it should be the last penny the ungrateful, extravagant son should get out of him, and that all he had should go to Tom, who had never given him half an hour's trouble or anxiety in his life, "or pleasure either," the old man had added in one of his rare moments of confidence, with a smile and a sigh for the scapegrace son whom he loved in spite of all. Mr. Murchison's hand shook as he unfolded the old paper, and his voice was so unsteady in reading it that Aunt Maria had to lean forward and put her hand to her ear to catch the full significance of the words that bequeathed all the old man's real and personal estate to his dear son Thomas Lucas. There were a few small legacies, and 10*l.* to each of the servants in his service at the time of his death. Mrs. Treasure and Jenkins had been young servants then, but they were old when that unsigned will had been drawn, and their master had left them a handsome legacy each, but now they were entitled to no more than little Lucy, the kitchen maid, who had only been in the place three weeks. I think they felt it more, or perhaps realized it more, even than Dick did, and Mrs. Treasure lost all her

portly defiance of manner, and went out of the room looking quite shabby and old and stooping, followed by Jenkins, who went off to the pantry and then and there got tipsy in cold blood, a thing he had never done in his life before.

When Mr. Murchison had finished reading he sat quite still, leaning back in his chair, and Dick also said nothing while the cousins and nephews edged their chairs nearer to one another and began talking in under-tones, with glances towards Uncle Tom and Dick.

And then Uncle Tom, who had been fidgeting his feet and clearing his throat nervously for some minutes, got up and leaned across the table to Dick.

"Dick," he said, "it shan't make any difference to you, my boy. We know what he meant to do for you, and——"

But just then Aunt Maria came in between, and Uncle Tom's outstretched hand dropped to his side and his voice died away. She was tying her bonnet-strings and buttoning her cloak.

"It is getting late, Tom," she said, "and we must be going home. I think we had better take a night to consider what it is right to do under the circumstances. Good-by, Dick. Good-by, little girls."

She kissed Letty before the child saw what she was going to do, but Sybil saw what was coming, and ducked her head so as to receive Aunt Maria's peck on the back of her neck. She stood a minute at the door while Uncle Tom fumbled under the table for his gloves, and she looked round the room with a glance of proprietorship that struck even the children as something new, as if it all belonged to her, Sybil said; and she examined a spot of grease on the bookcase and rubbed it off, just as she would have done at home, and she felt the material of the thick curtain over the door as if to see what it might fetch.

Dick got up with his usual courtesy to show her out and put her into the cab, having always been used in his grandfather's time to act the host, but to-day Aunt Maria did not appear to notice his offer of politeness, and the color rushed up into Dick's face, at this first hint, that he was no longer master in the old house.

The sympathy he met with from the cousins was almost more painful, and when one of them declared that he had been shamefully treated, and that the old man must have been a lunatic, and that if he were Dick he would go to law about it and have his rights, Dick could hardly resist kicking him, but he forbore,

and only said that his grandfather was the best and wisest man he knew, and the poor cousin went home more contented with the little, shabby house at Camberwell, and the anxious wife and six children who made such a pitiful struggle to be genteel on £150 a year, compared with the prospects of the young fellow who had suddenly exchanged riches for poverty. Mr. Murchison's grim silence was much more soothing to poor Dick, but even he soon took his departure, and the little girls went up to the nursery to tea, and Dick was left alone.

CHAPTER III.

A SORE HEART.

Dick did not come up to the nursery tea that evening as he generally did, and nurse insisted on the children going to bed early, principally because she wanted to join the conclave in the kitchen, who were discussing the events of the day. There was not one of the servants who was not heartily sorry for Dick and the two little girls, a great deal more sorry for the children than they were for themselves, for they did not understand all the difference that missing signature made to them; but in spite of the servants' pity there was somehow an alteration in their behavior that the children felt without understanding it. I do not think that Letty and Sybil would have been shuffled off to bed an hour earlier than usual if the will had been different, and when Sybil said she was thirsty and asked for some milk, nurse said there was none up stairs, and gave her

some water, instead of sending Martha down for some.

It was just the same with Dick. They were all so fond of him and so sorry for him, but the feeling that he was no longer the young master crept unintentionally into all they did, and perhaps he was unusually sensitive just then, and noticed little things he would not have thought of in former days; but the tears came pricking into his eyes when there was no spoon put for him to eat his soup with at dinner, and when the potatoes were burnt, though he was never one to think much of state and formality, or to care about little niceties of food or cookery, and he had more than a suspicion that poor old Jenkins had been taking more than was good for him, and that Mrs Treasure was hysterical, which would account for everything.

I suppose it was because the children had gone to bed earlier than usual that Letty and Sybil could not sleep, and, after a while, Sybil came stealing across and got into Letty's bed, and they talked with all the more satisfaction because they knew that talking after they were in bed was strictly forbidden. But there was no one to hear them, for nurse and Martha were both down stairs; and by and by Sybil

fancied that the kitten had got at nurse's work-basket and was tangling the reels of cotton; so the children felt it to be their duty to get up and put a stop to such reckless havoc as pussy was sure to work, and when they got into the day-nursery, though they found nothing of the sort going on, and that much maligned animal fast asleep in front of the fire, still they did not return forthwith to bed, but drew their little chairs up to the fender, and warmed their toes with the delightful feeling that they were doing something utterly unallowable.

"You see," said Sybil, "we can get back into bed directly we hear nurse coming upstairs."

The house was very quiet, and the children soon grew tired of sitting by the fire, and felt disposed for further adventures.

"I wonder where Dick is," Letty said, "and why he did not come and talk to us this evening? but I daresay he would if nurse had not made us go to bed."

"I wish he would come now," said Sybil. "Oh, Letty! let's go and find him. I dare say he's in the library, and very dull all by himself, and thinks we're asleep. Nurse won't know. We'll creep down on tiptoe, and make Dick come up here with us."

No sooner said than done. They found their dressing-gowns and little slippers, and because Sybil thought that the kitten would be frightened at being left all alone, they took her with them. They passed the door of their grandfather's bedroom very fast, for it was a little way open, and Letty fancied she heard a sound inside, and was not sure there was not light shining through the crack.

But when they reached the library they found, to their disappointment, that Dick was not there. He must have been sitting there, for there was a newspaper lying by the arm-chair and some letters in Dick's writing on the table, but he was not there. Neither was he in the dining-room, where the remains of dinner were still spread on the table.

"Perhaps he has gone out," whispered Sybil.

But no; there was his hat in the hall.

"Can he have gone to bed so early?"

Dick's bedroom was on the same floor as old Mr. Lucass,' and just as they got to his door, pussy, who had been struggling a good deal all the way, escaped from Sybil's hold and ran right into the old man's room; and before the children had time to think what they were about, they had followed her in. There was some one there, and they stood thunder

struck, hardly knowing if nurse or a ghost were most to be feared or expected, and Dick (for it was he) looking up, saw two little things in scarlet dressing gowns, with rough heads and big, round eyes staring at him aghast. And well they might, for Dick looked up at them with a face that was not a bit like the Dick they knew and loved—the bright, happy, trusting Dick, fearless and frank.

His candle stood on the toilet-table, guttering, with a thief in it, and he was sitting with his arms stretched out across the table and his head on his arms, and behind was the window with the blind drawn up all crooked, showing the foggy night outside and the dark houses opposite, giving an unutterably dreary effect to the room. His face was quite of a piece with the room; so sad and hopeless, and set and grey: but it cleared and altered in a moment —the moment he saw his little sisters—and he held out his arms and they rushed into them.

"Oh, Dick! we've been looking for you everywhere; oh, Dick, come away from this horrid room; come into the nursery."

"All right," he said, "you two little scarlet ghosts. They told me you were in bed an hour ago."

"So we were, Dick; but we couldn't sleep, and we wanted you."

"Come along then,"

He took Sybil up in his arms and held Letty's hand; but before they left the room he stopped by the empty bed, and spoke very soft and gently: "Dear, dear old grandfather, we know it was all a mistake; we quite understand, Letty, Sybil, and I. You meant to do all that was kind and generous for us; and whatever people may say, we shall always be grateful and loving in our thought of you."

That half-hour before nurse came bustling up and swept the two little girls off to bed again, was wonderfully soothing to Dick's poor, sore, sick young heart, though Sybil fell asleep in his arms and Letty only rested her soft cheek against his arm as she sat in her little chair by his side, and looked up with great, loving eyes and said, "Poor old Dick! dear old Dick!" without understanding one fraction of all the weight that was settling down on her young brother.

He had been feeling so bad, and bitter and resentful. When all the relations were gone, and even Mr. Murchison had left, with only a few words, being too upset and overwhelmed even to express the deep sympathy he felt, and Dick was left alone, and sat over his comfortless dinner in the great, gloomy dining-room, trying to realise his new situation and

to put away the bright future that only a couple of hours before seemed so certainly his, and that now was utterly impossible, it seemed incredible that he was no longer the Dick Lucas, Christ Church, Oxford, who was going to take his degree next year and be called to the Bar the year after; to whom society was opening its doors and making itself as delightful as it can to a young man of good looks, good manners, and plenty of money; that those luxurious rooms at Oxford were no longer his, that the thoroughbred hunter he had bought only the other day, and only ridden once, must pass into other hands, and that the few little bills that had seemed a mere flea bite to confess to the liberal old grandfather, must now be scrutinized and commented on by Aunt Maria looking through Uncle Tom's eyes and speaking with his tongue. What could he do? Where could he turn?"

"I am so young," he said, with that terrible self-pity that saps the strength more than anything else. "And there are the two little girls."

But after that quiet half-hour in the nursery with Sybil's gentle sleeping breath coming and going against his cheek, and Letty's soft little fingers stroking and fondling his, half the bitterness seemed gone.

"I am so young," he said, using the very same words that had expressed all the pity and cruelty of it, half an hour before, but now expressed the comfort. "I am so young and strong, there must be work I can do, and there are the two little girls, so I have something to work for."

CHAPTER IV.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

THERE was something hopeful and exhilarating about the weather next morning, and the servants thought some unexpected piece of good news must have come to Dick during the night, when they heard him whistling to himself over his dressing as light-hearted as a lark. He even felt surprised at himself when he looked in the glass that he was not haggard and heavy-eyed, with black care sitting visibly on his shoulders, touching his hair with grey, and drawing lines round mouth and eyes. On the contrary he looked uncommonly fresh and youthful, but what can you not do when you are young and in good health, and have had a perfectly good night, enlivened with dreams of a capital run with the hounds, when the February sky is blue even through London smoke and there is a breath of spring and violets in the air

that drives away all memory of the fogs that curtained you in only yesterday?

Dick found a note on the breakfast table awaiting him from Uncle Tom, asking him to come round that morning to his house to talk over arrangements, as he had a touch of gout in one foot and could not get down to the bank that day. Dick shrewdly suspected that Uncle Tom's gout was brought on by Aunt Maria's anxiety to be present at any interview that might take place, and by her fixed determination to have a voice, and that a very ruling one, in any arrangements that might be made, and he would much rather have settled it all with Uncle Tom alone in his room at the bank, or in Mr. Murchison's office, with the kind, old lawyer to put everything in its best light.

But there was no help for it; gout is a circumstance to which we must all give way. So, breakfast being over, Dick called the little girls to put on their things and come with him.

Jenkins came into the hall to help him on with his overcoat; the old man was looking very dilapidated after his last night's excess, and Dick, who guessed the cause of part of his miserable looks, had taken no notice of his sigh as he handed the coffee, or his

sniff over the fried bacon; but now there was something so appealing in the old man's dejected face that Dick took hold of the unsteady hand that was fumbling with his coat and shook it warmly.

"Cheer up, old friend," he said; "there are better days in store for us all yet, never fear!" which sent the old man shuffling off sobbing into the pantry, hardly hearing Dick's concluding words, "but I don't think whisky will bring them any the quicker." But I think the kindness and the shake of the hand carried the moral straighter to his heart than any words could have done.

Letty and Sybil came running down stairs, pulling on obstinate, new, black gloves in a violent and reckless manner in their haste to be off, and the three set off very cheerfully, though the children experienced the first pinch of their fallen fortunes when Dick refused to buy them each a bunch of violets from the basket that was offered temptingly at the corner. They passed the cabstand too with firm resolution, not to be shaken by the most insinuating touching of hats or raising of whips from friendly cabbies, and Dick felt as if he were already two shillings the richer for the saved cab-hire.

There was plenty of time; they were all good

walkers, and Dick's pride would not swallow an omnibus just at present—poor, silly fellow; though Letty and Sybil grew silent towards the end of the walk and dragged back a good deal, stoutly denying, however, all the time that they were the least tired.

They found Uncle Tom established in the armchair in the dining-room, with one of his feet swathed in flannel and laid up on a chair, and Aunt Maria mounting guard over the sufferer with her knitting and with all the outward marks of a patient and long-suffering wife, ready to attend to the slightest wish of her irritable lord and master.

There was no doubt that Uncle Tom was thoroughly uncomfortable and ill at ease, but whether this was from the gout or from what he had to say to Dick, is not, I think, doubtful, even though it had been persistently pointed out to him during the watches of the night, that what he was going to propose was the best, and wisest, and most generous, and, in fact, the only course to take. But the words were not very sweet to Uncle Tom's lips and he would gladly have turned over in his bed and gone to sleep and left his wife and Dick to fight it out together; and the sound of Aunt Maria's knitting needles, which had a little, vicious click peculiar to

themselves, made him so nervous, that the groan he gave vent to every now and then was by no means unprovoked, though not by the twinges of gout to which Dick attributed them, and which were really of the very slightest description.

"Well, Dick," he said, after the preliminaries about health and weather had been got through, "it must have been a very great surprise to you the way matters went yesterday. So it was to all—eh, my dear?" appealing to his wife, who was, however, too busy counting the stitches on one of her needles to make any answer. So he had to turn back to Dick, who replied that it certainly was a great surprise.

"It comes very hard on you, Dick; as, of course, it will make some difference in your prospects."

"Of course," said Dick. "All the difference in the world."

He spoke so cheerfully, that Uncle Tom went on more easily and with less humming and hawing. "I'm glad to see you take it so well, for your aunt and I have been saying how hard it comes on you to give up Oxford, though we were never in favor of your going there in the first instance."

A moment before, Dick would have said that he had known from the very first that Oxford was now

quite out of the question, and that even if Uncle Tom, with startling and unexpected generosity, had offered to let him remain till he had taken his degree, he would, on no account, have agreed to do so at his expense, but still there must have been lurking somewhere undetected in his inmost heart a hope that things might after all turn out differently, for, at those words of Uncle Tom's, a dull pain awoke in his heart that only the uprooting of a hope can cause. But he only laughed, and neither Uncle Tom nor Aunt Maria loved him well enough to notice the harshness of that laugh, and only Letty, who had declined to go to the nursery with Sybil, glanced up quickly at his face as if she heard something unusual. But there was nothing to be read there, then or afterwards, while Uncle Tom unfolded the plans he and Aunt Maria had sketched out during the night, and Dick only said, "To be sure," and "Of course," and "Thank you, sir," with such quiet submission that Aunt Maria looked sharply at him, more than once, to see if there were any concealed sarcasm, in the thanks for what, even she could not help feeling, was not a very generous proposal.

Dick was to have a place in the bank with a salary of 100*l.* a year.

Dick writhed a little as Aunt Maria pointed out that it was out of pure kindness (she could not quite bring out the word charity) that his uncle took him on, as no extra clerk was wanted, and he would not be of the slightest use for months, if at all, as young men who had been brought up in idle, extravagant habits very rarely become good men of business; but he only said he would do his best and was awfully obliged; and he tried not to think of the clerks, on whom he had hitherto looked down, and whom he had patronized in an easy, good-natured way with a sublime, assured feeling of superiority and who would now be his equals, if not his superiors.

Uncle Tom's spirits quite rose at the quiet and satisfactory way in which he was getting through the business, and Dick's attention wandered a little from the arrangements for the sale of the furniture in Bedford Place and the letting of the house, the details of which were to be left to Mr. Murchison, though that gentleman was in no favor with Aunt Maria at present. As she told Dick, she could not have much confidence in a man who expressed himself in such an unprofessional and ungentlemanlike way as he had done over the unsigned will; but Uncle Tom

had declared that it would be impossible to put the business into other hands, so paying the lawyer out must be left till another day.

Dick would have to find lodgings for himself in the neighborhood of Lucas's Bank. "And I ought to caution you, Dick," said Aunt Maria, "that your means will not allow of any extravagance."

"No, you will have to be careful," said Uncle Tom, "for though there will be the 50*l.* a year from your father's estate——"

"But there are the little girls!" said Dick, suddenly arousing to the fact that he had forgotten Letty and Sybil, and grown selfish in his trouble; "there are the little girls."

And Uncle Tom also roused to the consciousness that he was not out of the wood yet, and that perhaps this might be the most difficult part of it.

"I was coming to them," he said. "Letty, run away to the nursery."

But Letty only drew closer to Dick.

"Your aunt and I have thought a great deal about the children, and though your aunt was anxious" (here Uncle Tom gave a swallow as if the words stuck in his throat) "to have them to bring up with Ellen and Grace" (here Letty squeezed Dick's

hand, in horror, very hard), "we felt there were a good many objections, and that it was our duty to consider first what would be for the good of our own children."

"Certainly," agreed Dick.

"So your aunt has consented to give up her wish, and she has got particulars of a school which we think would be very suitable."

"Indeed," said Dick, with a reassuring pat to a trembling little hand clinging to his arm.

"It seems an excellently managed establishment, and the terms are very moderate."

"They are rather young for school yet," said Dick.

"Not at all, not at all," said Aunt Maria; "they have been shamefully spoiled, and no doubt are very backward. Grace and Ellen at their age were well advanced, and it is high time they should be learning something, if they are to support themselves when they grow up."

"What?" said Dick. He could hardly believe his ears, and he turned to Aunt Maria such a look of amazement, and spoke so suddenly and sharply that it quite startled her, and caused her to drop half a dozen stitches off her needles; and she went on

irritably with her eyes fixed on the knitting as she picked up the stitches, which prevented her seeing the storm signals that were rising in Dick's face, compressed lips, rising color, and eyes that flashed and clouded in a manner very unlike their usual kind good-nature. But Uncle Tom saw them, and grew so nervous that he actually hoisted his gouty foot down off the chair and drummed on the ground with it, which may have shown either the intensity of his mental, or the slightness of his bodily sufferings.

"We must not close our eyes to the future," Aunt Maria went on; "of course the little girls will have to earn their livings, as they are entirely unprovided for, and it is quite our duty, whatever the cost may be, to give them the means of doing so by a thoroughly good education."

Dick said nothing; he was looking at little Letty, who, being tired with her walk, looked more delicate and fragile and like Dresden china than ever, with less rose-leaf color in her cheeks and a serious, wistful look in her great, soft eyes as they turned from Aunt Maria to Dick, trying to understand what was said.

And just then Sybil came slipping in; she had quarrelled with Ellen and Grace in the nursery be-

cause they had said that Dick was a beggar, and would have to sweep a crossing, and, I am sorry to say, she had slapped Ellen's face and pinched Grace's arm, and, finding after this that the nursery was too hot to hold her, had come to find protection with Dick.

"The school is at Camberwell, and the present opportunity is most favorable, as there are some vacancies, and Miss Primmer is willing to take two sisters at a reduction, and no doubt she might be induced to lower her terms still more on the understanding that when they get older they shall assist in the teaching and needlework. She has a good many gentlemen's children among the pupils, as the school is principally intended for the daughters of the clergy and people in distressed circumstances. They are all dressed alike, and the feeding is, I am told, very good—plain, of course, but plentiful."

Here at last she paused for Dick. to express his satisfaction, and as he made no remark she looked up. "Well?" she said, "don't you think it will do very well?"

"No," Dick answered. His voice trembled a little, but he was doing his best to answer quietly, and to keep his temper. "No, I don't think it would

do for my sisters at all. I will not let them go to a charity school."

I think Aunt Maria was taken by surprise; he had listened so quietly, and being, as I have said, absorbed in her knitting, she had not seen from his face that he was not taking it well, so perhaps this was some slight excuse for her losing her temper, as she did, completely.

"*His* sisters, indeed! Why were *his* sisters better than any other penniless children? Perhaps he would find the money to put them to a first-class school, or keep them at home, cockered up in the ridiculous luxury they have been accustomed to. Charity school! forsooth! And what was it but charity in future that would put bread in their mouths and clothes on their backs? My word! it was fine to hear beggars talk!" And so she ran on, working herself up into a fury that was only increased by Uncle Tom's little attempts to soothe her—"But, my dear—Maria, my love—I am sure that Dick—" and by Dick's persistent silence, for he would not forget that he was a gentleman, however hard he found it to remember that she was a lady.

All the same he was very angry; no doubt it was very foolish of him, and it would have been better

for him and the little girls to keep on good terms with their relations; but young blood is hot, and he could not endure the thought of his little, delicate, dainty sisters having to scramble and shift for themselves at a rough-and-ready charity school. So, at the first break in the torrent of words, he turned to his uncle: "I was in too great a hurry, sir," he said, "to accept the offer of a seat in your bank. I think on consideration I must decline it. I mean to keep my sisters with me, and must try and find a situation that will not separate us."

"Wait a bit, Dick," entreated Uncle Tom, but was snuffed out in a moment by his wife, and collapsed groaning into his arm-chair.

"Oh! don't press it on him, no doubt it's not nearly good enough for him; no doubt he can command any situation he pleases, and it is only an insult to offer him anything less than a partnership!"

Dick was pretty well at the end of his patience by this time, and Letty had begun to cry, and Sybil was much inclined to follow suit, and he often wondered afterwards how he managed to keep silence and make his escape without letting his indignation boil over into hasty words; but somehow it was done, and he found himself walking at a tremendous rate

along one of the side paths in Regent's Park, quite oblivious as to where he was going, or that he was going so fast that Sybil and Letty had to run to keep up with him, and were out of breath and tired.

CHAPTER V.

AN OPENING.

"I've been and gone and done it now," Dick said an hour later, as he came into Mr. Murchison's quiet office in Lincoln's Inn Fields. He said it with a laugh, but Mr. Murchison, pushing away the papers in which he had been entirely engrossed, and looking up at Dick's face, was not taken in by his joking manner.

"Have you been and gone and had luncheon?" asked the old man in reply.

"Luncheon? Yes—no—I breakfasted late," said poor Dick, too full of his troubles to understand, as Mr. Murchison did, that hunger might be an aggravation of them.

"Well, perhaps you won't mind coming round with me while I have mine? I find I can't get along without a square meal in the middle of the day," said that cunning old sinner, who had only just come

back ten minutes ago from his luncheon, which was always of the most spare condition.

Dick could not well refuse to accompany him, nor could he decline to take any part of the plentiful meal that Mr. Murchison ordered for himself—much to the amazement of the waiter, who was used to the old lawyer's small appetite and regular, precise tastes.

So Dick took up his knife and fork just for politeness' sake, and to amuse himself while his old friend lunched, and he amused himself to so much purpose that in twenty minutes he felt twice the man he had been, and much less inclined to look on the tragic side of life; and he gave Mr. Murchison a very different account of what had passed in the morning to what he would have done before luncheon, and even found excuses for Aunt Maria, and blamed and laughed at himself for having been made so furious by the scolding of an angry woman.

But not the softening effects of a good luncheon, nor the wise counsels of the old lawyer, could bring him to reconsider his determination, and to accept the place offered him in the bank, or to allow his aunt any voice in the disposal of the little girls. He might, perhaps, though I rather doubt it, have been

induced to eat humble pie for himself; but when it was a question of serving out that bitter portion to Letty and Sybil, his whole soul rose in revolt. He threw up his head, with his teeth set, and his nostrils dilating, and clenched his hands, "for all the world," said Mr. Murchison, "as if I were Mrs. Tom Lucas, and you were going to knock me down."

In his inmost heart the old lawyer could not be angry with the boy for his sensitive pride for his little sisters, though he rated him soundly for being headstrong and self-willed, and for quarrelling with his bread and butter, feeling himself all the time that if his bread had to be buttered by Mrs. Tom Lucas he would rather go without even to starvation; for he had no love for that lady, and guessed that Dick would have fared much better at his uncle's hands if it had not been for her influence.

Lawyers see so much of the dark and dirty side of human nature, I often wonder how any of them can keep any faith in goodness and truth and high-mindedness.

"And now," Dick said, "what am I to do?"

They were back in Lincoln's Inn Fields by this time, in Mr. Murchison's room—such a quaint, curious room at the back of the house, so quiet that you

could scarcely guess you were within a stone's throw of the ceaseless traffic of Holborn, and lighted by a skylight with colored panes introduced, surrounded by handsome, heavy plaster mouldings and cornices of the last century. The marble mantlepiece was richly carved with fauns and naked boys carrying bunches of grapes—but I do not know why I should mention all these details, except because they were always associated in Dick's mind with the plans for his future life which were debated on that occasion.

"What am I to do?"

The old lawyer sat drumming reflectively on his blotting-paper, and on a blue letter written in a crabbed, curious hand that lay upon it. He had it in his heart to say, "I have no chick nor child of my own, and a large balance at my banker's that grows every year without giving me either pleasure or profit, and I am willing to take your grandfather's place to you and the little girls, and will do as much as he was able and intended to do, or perhaps even more, and make my old age happier and brighter and fuller of interest than any other part of my life has been." But it was utterly impossible to him to say the words; he had always been so prudent and business-like and far-sighted that he could not do a

rash, open-handed act of generosity on the spur of the moment, like any short-sighted, inconsiderate mortal. Well, they say fools rush in where angels fear to tread, but sometimes, it seems to me, the fools get the best of it; and the old lawyer in his lonely chambers in his solitary old age, even with the consolation of that ever-increasing balance at his banker's, was inclined, sometimes, to wish that he had not been so wise.

"I'm afraid I'm not good for much," said Dick. "Aunt Maria says I shall never make a good man of business; but I'll do my best. I write a pretty good hand, you know, and I'm not such a duffer at figures as some fellows. What have you got there?"

For Mr. Murchison was unfolding the blue letter before him with a doubtful, hesitating air, which roused Dick's curiosity.

"It's a letter I received this morning, strangely enough, from an old client of mine at Slowmill. He's a solicitor, and he writes to ask if I can send him a clerk. He has a managing clerk, who has been with him for years, and has all the business at his fingers' ends; but he wants another to take the place of a nephew who has gone to the bad. He wants a gentlemanly young fellow who writes a good

hand. The fact of the matter is, he is bringing out a big legal work, and it's more a sort of secretary he wants than anything else. He has been at it this twenty years, and I don't believe it's any nearer completion than it was ten years ago. It needs a lot of patience, I can tell you. He thinks of nothing else, and he kept that young nephew of his so close at it that he broke down and went to the bad—got into debt, forged his uncle's name, and made off. No, Dick; it wouldn't do for you," answering the eager look in Dick's eyes before it was put into words. "It would wear you out, body and soul. You don't know what a place Slowmill is, or what a slave-driver old Burgess is when he's mounted on his hobby."

"Do you think I should go to the bad like the nephew?" said Dick. "I don't feel as if I had much go left in me either way. Won't you speak a word for me?" he went on eagerly. "It would be so fine to tell Uncle Tom that I have found a situation, and take the children right away. I don't much mind what I do, or how little I get for it, as long as I'm out of sight. I was thinking as I came along that I shouldn't mind a groom's place; for I do know something about horses. By Jove! if Letty

and Sybil were only boys, I'd do it and we could live over the stables, and be as jolly as sand-boys; but, of course, with the girls it wouldn't do. What does the old beggar offer?—I beg his pardon—Mr. Burgess, didn't you call him?"

"The salary is not much," said Mr. Murchison. "In fact, I hardly think it worth your taking."

"'Beggars musn't be choosers,'" said Dick. "I had that instilled into me this morning, and I'm not likely to forget it. What's the figure?"

"The salary to a competent person would be 80*l.* It's absurd," said Mr. Murchison, folding up the letter and stowing it away in his pocket; "not to be thought of."

"Wait a bit," urged Dick. "It's not so bad, after all—only twenty pounds less than Uncle Tom offered me, and thought he was doing the handsome with a vengeance. What's twenty pounds more or less, if you come to think of it?" (Experience had not taught him that 20*l.* more may make little difference, but 20*l.* less matters infinitely more.) "I call it uncommonly good for a beginner. But do you think I've a chance? such a lot of fellows will be after it. Look here, couldn't you write a line for me to take down, and I'd interview the old fellow? Oh, don't

you be afraid! I'll make him think me a second Solomon. I'll roar as softly as any sucking dove. I shouldn't have time to run down this afternoon," consulting his watch; "but I could go to-morrow morning."

But Mr. Murchison still hesitated. "You have not a notion what a dull place Slowmill is."

"So much the better. Even on 80*l.* a year we could not afford much society."

"There's not a gentleman but Burgess in the place."

"Perhaps if there were they might not think much of a lawyer's clerk. Look here, I don't expect to find a bed of roses anywhere; but I'd rather bear the thorns out of sight. Now, sit down and write a letter of recommendation for me; make the best of a bad job, old friend, and paint my portrait in the colors you think would be most taking, and I'll give you a specimen of my patience by not interrupting till it's done."

And so Dick sat, with his hands dug deep down into his trousers' pockets, and his eyes fixed on the dull coals in the grate, that crumbled and died into ashes as his bright hopes and ambitions had done; or on the dancing boys carved on the mantlepiece,

who had grinned and capered before many a dull eye and heavy, broken heart in the lawyer's office.

It was a long business, writing that letter, but at last it was done, and Dick went off with it in his pocket in capital spirits. In the evening he was up in the nursery describing to the little girls the cottage they would live in at Slowmill and the pleasures of country life, busily counting his chickens before they are hatched, when a ring at the bell and old Jenkins, puffing and blowing up stairs, announced that Mr. Tom Lucas had come to see his nephew.

He had had a hard time of it since the morning, and I hardly know how he had managed to make his escape and come to Bedford Place. His gouty foot was still in a slipper, but there was no other sign of the malady of the morning, and he got up quite briskly from his chair when his nephew came into the library and went forward to meet him.

"I can't stop a minute," he said; "but I just wanted to say that you must not be in a hurry or take too seriously anything your aunt said this morning. She has been very much upset, and she's a martyr to her nerves—positively a martyr—Dick."

He might have added, "And so am I;" but Dick

mentally added it for him, only he altered the word nerves into temper.

"When she has one of her nervous attacks she really hardly knows what she's about. There's not a kinder-hearted woman than your Aunt Maria in London. 'Pon my word there's not, Dick."

There was something so deprecating and appealing in Uncle Tom's manner, that Dick, in the softness of his heart, would have liked to agree in his opinion of Aunt Maria's virtues; but he was still too sore and smarting from the morning's castigation to be anything but sincere, so he assured his uncle that it was all right and no bones broken.

Uncle Tom gave a sigh of relief and turned to go. "Then you'll come round to the bank to-morrow morning, and we'll settle when you shall begin work; and as for the children, we need not be in any hurry about them for the present."

Dick had thought what a fine thing it would be to tell his uncle that he had another situation and was quite independent of him and Aunt Maria; but now he felt quite a twinge of compunction at upsetting the other's relief and satisfaction, more especially as Uncle Tom was looking worn and tired, and limped a little as he walked to the door.

"Here, take my arm," he said, "and let me help you out to the cab. You should not have come out, sir; you will have made your foot worse again." And when he had put him into the cab and told the man where to drive, he fired off his parting shot quickly.

"I'm afraid I can't come to the bank to-morrow, for I've heard of a situation at Slowmill that I must go and see after,"

"Eh! What? What? What?"

"A situation as clerk, which seems likely to suit me, and where I can take the little girls. Good night, and thank you, sir."

That drive up to Regent's Park was not a pleasant one to Uncle Tom, and, by the time he reached home, he was so groaning and miserable that he was only fit to hobble up to bed.

"And serve him right too!" said Aunt Maria.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST DAY IN THE OLD HOME.

"He won't get it," said Aunt Maria, "mark my words, it was just a piece of flourish. Take my advice and just let him alone for a bit till he learns that good situations are not as plentiful as blackberries, and we shall soon have him up here singing a very different tune and glad to fall in with anything we may propose. And meantime, of course, the servants must be dismissed and the sale of the furniture put in hand, and that will help to bring my young gentleman to his senses."

I do not think that Uncle Tom could have carried out his wife's instructions so exactly, if it had not been for a fortnight's attack of illness which happened to him then, partly gout, but mostly nervous irritability and vexation of spirit. Whatever the exact nature of his complaint may have been, he really was *bonâ*

fide ill, and in the doctor's and Aunt Maria's hands, and had to transact his business at home; and during one or two interviews which he had with Mr. Murchison, that gentleman was so extremely taciturn and morose that nothing was to be got out of him except the very driest business arrangements, and he was also apparently afflicted with deafness whenever Aunt Maria was out of the room and Uncle Tom ventured a question in a low voice about Dick and the children.

Of course Uncle Tom knew that the servants had received their legacies and wages, and been discharged, and that the house was already partly dismantled after the first day's sale; for Mrs. Tom had commented severely on the wages that that idle stuck-up nurse had received for doing nothing, and had also bought in the dining-room carpet and a sofa, on which she had looked with envy for some time past; but still he experienced a decided shock when, the day he was able to go out, he drove to the bank by a circuitous route which took him by Bedford Place.

A hearth-rug was hanging from the balcony, displaying a bill of the sale, which also fluttered on either side of the door, at which a group of greasy Jewish-looking men stood, as if they were quite the masters

of the situation. The steps, which had been Mrs. Treasure's pride and glory in their spotless whiteness, were now dirty, and littered with straw and bits of paper, and on the pavement, waiting to be carried off in the van yawning to receive it, and with an aggressively clear "Lot 25" stuck on its arm, stood the big leather arm-chair in which he had so often seen his old father sitting.

The Jewish gentlemen fastened on Uncle Tom as their natural prey, concluding him to be a simple-minded bidder; but he paid no attention to their nasal civilities, but went in, and up the stairs, in spite of his limping foot, to the nursery, as if he expected still to find the two little girls arranging the Noah's Ark animals along the table, and turning two smiling little faces towards him as he came in as they had done the last time he was there, on the day of the old man's death.

It was as desolate as an empty robin's nest in the snow, and Uncle Tom turned and hurried away, wondering why he had come, and what he expected to find, and wishing he could forget Lot 94, "rocking chair and high fire-guard," or Lot 97, "Noah's Ark and doll's house," which came persistently between him and his writing all the day.

Nor did he get much consolation from Mr. Murchison, on whom he called in the afternoon, for the lawyer was up to his eyes in work, and could only spare a minute to tell Mr. Tom Lucas that his nephew had left London the week before for Slowmill, where he believed he had a good situation, and had taken his sisters with him, and had desired him, Mr. Murchison, to tell his uncle that he would write to him very shortly.

"What has he done about his rooms at Oxford and his bills there?"

"All settled, my dear sir; but you'll excuse me, I have an appointment at four, and you know what business is, so I need not apologize."

"Good day to you," said Mr. Tom Lucas, wrathfully, with a firm determination to put his business forthwith into other hands—a determination which Mr. Murchison read plainly in the other's sulky face and voice, and answered by a mental snap of the fingers and "Don't care if you do!"

Those Oxford bills of Dick's had come in like a hailstorm as soon as his present circumstances became known, and Mr. Murchison and Dick had more than one battle over them, as the lawyer maintained that Mr. Tom Lucas ought clearly to pay them, and

Dick as stoutly persisted that he ought not and should not. Luckily Dick's birthday had been shortly before, and the old man had sent him a handsome cheque; and his rooms at Oxford were full of pretty things. He had been a bit of a collector of bric-a-brac and old china, and had a few pictures which were worth something, though of course not half what he originally gave for them; but Dick had plenty of friends at Oxford, and the sale was well managed, and the dealers did not have it all their own way; so when it was over there was enough money to pay off all the bills and leave a little over to start Dick's housekeeping at Slowmill.

I think the old lawyer's heart bled the most of the two over the dispersion of all the pretty things that the spoilt young favorite of fortune had gathered round him. Dick kept a very brave face and laughed at the old lawyer's groans and grunts, and quite persuaded the little girls and almost persuaded himself that it was all a good piece of fun.

Letty and Sybil received a great deal of commiseration from the servants during the few days that elapsed between the funeral and their leaving Bedford Place. They agreed that if nurse and Martha had always been so kind in the matter of buttered toast for tea,

and amiable on the subject of untidy nurseries and dirty pinafores, they should have been a great deal more sorry to say good-by to them. As for Mrs. Treasure, they had always been very fond of her, but they had never before enjoyed such complete freedom to run in and out of the kitchen and explore into cupboards and larder and scullery; and they availed themselves fully of it, which may, perhaps, have accounted for the dirty pinafores to which nurse was so unusually lenient.

There was not one of the servants who did not protest, and some of them with tears in their eyes, that if ever Mr. Dick came back to London and needed their services, they would come to him even if it were "from the Injes itself;" and old Jenkins begged and entreated to come with him to Slowmill, leaving the matter of wages to be decided in the future. For one and all of the servants felt convinced that everything must come right in the future; there could not but be a bright prospect for Dick, even though the clouds might be thick just now overhead; in the midst of all his troubles there was a brightness in his face and a confidence in his manner that might even now have justified the brown-faced gipsy girls, who had plagued him at Ascot and Henley with requests

to tell his fortune, in saying, "Sure, it's a lucky face you have, my pretty gentleman!"

It was difficult to impress on Jenkins that not only were wages out of the question, but that even the mere keep of an extra person was more than his very limited income would allow; and when at last it was made plain to him, he sat looking at Dick quite aghast for five minutes in silence, and then got up and bolted out of the room without saying a word. Dick thought he had gone to conceal his emotion, and gave a little smile and a sigh to himself at the queer contortions of the old man's working face.

It was the last evening in the dear old home, that had often seemed dull and dingy to the young man, but now was full of kindly memories and homelike associations. His portmanteau was half packed, and the little girls' box was already standing strapped in the hall; the rooms were partly dismantled, and the dining-room furniture was already adorned with the lot tickets in preparation for the sale. Some of the servants had left already, and only two remained to see the last of the young master and the little girls.

Mr. Murchison had been with Dick most of the evening, and they had smoked a cigar together, or rather Dick had smoked a short briar-wood pipe,

for he had eschewed cigars, and suchlike extravagances.

Mr. Murchison had been very jolly that evening, and so had Dick; they had told capital stories, and had laughed till they had wondered at one another and themselves, and had parted with a joke and a smile, as if all the evening their hearts had not been aching away, in most perfect sympathy.

Jenkins listened a minute or two at the library door after Mr. Murchison had gone; he had heard the laughing, and been puzzled by it. "Gentlefolks has queer ways," he said, as he shook his old head, with its forty years' experience of those ways, gained in his office of butler; "it don't seem much of a laughing matter to me."

But when he opened the door softly and caught sight of Dick's head lying on his arms in an attitude of deep despondency, he knew that hearts gentle or simple are of the same nature all the world over, and that Dick's heart was sinking down very low in spite of his most strenuous efforts to keep it up.

Of course Dick grew very red when he found the old man's compassionate eye fixed upon him, and he pretended that he was only leaning over the table to pick something up, and that he was sleepy and had

a bit of a cold. But Jenkins was not to be deceived, and after all Dick found that it was rather a relief not to keep up that ghastly attempt at cheerfulness any longer; so he made the old man come and sit down and have a talk, and it was then that Jenkins, as I have said, made the proposal to accompany him to Slowmill, and, on hearing Dick's answer beat a precipitate retreat without a word of explanation. He was not gone long, but returned rather gasping and out of breath, and dusty, as if he had been burrowing in the bowels of the earth, and glancing nervously over his shoulder right and left, to make sure that he was not observed, and then from inside his coat he produced, done up in many wrappers, a greasy, savings bank book, and, with a choking voice, and tears standing in his eyes, pushed it into Dick's hand, saying, "'Twere honestly come by, not a penny as I hadn't a right to. I might have robbed the old master every day of the week and no one been any the wiser, but it wasn't my way, and I never touched a penny but what was mine. Ever since the will came out all wrong I've made up my mind as I'd leave the money to you when I died; but there! I never guessed things had got so bad with you, so you'd best have it now, as it ain't no good waiting

till I'm gone. Lor bless you! I've a deal of life left in me yet; I'll take another place and save as much again, maybe, before I'm laid on the shelf, and 'twere all saved in your gran'pa's service, so, if you ain't the best right to it, I don't know who has."

He was talking very fast, and running one sentence into another, to keep down a gasp that was rising in his throat, and he thrust his hands deep into his pockets to hide how they were trembling, and he interrupted himself in the very middle of a sentence, and bid his young master "Good night" in a would-be jocular way, and went out whistling a cracked air in a minor key with his quivering old lips.

It cost him a great deal to part with that precious book, every entry in which he had by heart, and in which every small sum of interest that had been added had been gloated over with the keenest satisfaction; indeed it had almost taken the place of a child to the solitary old man, and it was like sacrificing an only son when he put the book into Dick's hand and went away bereaved.

But it was only for a minute, for before he had reached the pantry door Dick was after him, and the old man's hands, with the precious book in them, were

being shaken in Dick's strong affectionate young grasp, till the book was crumpled and the hands tingling.

"Did you think I'd take it?" Dick said, in a very husky, choked voice. "Good old friend, God bless you! And I can't thank you, or I shall make such a confounded fool of myself, there'll be no end of it."

And away he bolted up stairs three steps at a time and locked himself into his room, leaving Jenkins sobbing and stroking out the crumpled pages of his precious book, half disappointed, half relieved, and not knowing how acts of self-sacrificing love are entered in another account, and interest of untold value added.

CHAPTER VII.

SLOWMILL.

LETTY and Sybil had from the first taken a very hopeful view of the move to Slowmill; at their age every change has infinite possibilities of amusement, and when the change involved entire freedom from the tyranny of nurse and Martha, and the constant company of Dick, they felt that nothing was left to be desired. They shed a few natural tears over the widely-expanded nostrils of the rocking-horse, and made their mouths very painty by diligently kissing each of the Noah's Ark animals, even down to the grasshoppers and ladybirds; but when the cab was at the door, and their box and Dick's portmanteau safely on the top, they were in a fever to be off, and could hardly spare a farewell look on the pleasant nursery which had been their home nearly as long as they could remember.

Dick even was young enough to be infected by the children's good spirits, and Jenkins, standing solitary on the door step, saw three such smiling faces drive away in the cab that he gave a little wintry smile himself, in spite of the tears in his eyes.

The journey, too, was delightful, the third-class carriage having all the charm of novelty, and Mrs. Treasure having provided such a store of cakes and tarts and sandwiches, as allowed not only plenty for themselves but enough to supply their fellow travellers liberally, and even to offer some to the guard when he came to clip the tickets.

They were a little tired by the time they reached Slowmill, for, after the railway journey, came three miles in a very jolting omnibus, in company with a very stout old woman, who was precipitated first on Letty and then on Sybil, till they were flattened both in mind and body.

But when they arrived at Slowmill, and the omnibus stopped before Mr. Tysoe's, and Mr. Tysoe came out himself in his white apron, and smiling as only he was capable of, to lift the little girls out, they forgot their flatness and fatigue in a moment, and were full of eager delight and satisfaction at their new quarters.

Slowmill is built in the shape of a Y, and just at the corner where the three roads meet is situated the shop of Tysoe, grocer and tea-dealer as is announced over the door in large mottled china letters, and the same legend is recorded in bits of peel on a brown sugar ground in one of the windows. Tysoe's business has been established in Slowmill from father to son for four generations, and though, of late years, a new grocer had started in High Street with plate glass windows and co-operative prices, and the figure of a Chinaman with a nodding head in the window, Tysoe can afford to treat him with the contempt he deserves, for he makes no way in the world of Slowmill.

At one side of Tysoe's shop-front is a private door, very tall and narrow, with a knocker so high up that Letty and Sybil would require the assistance of an umbrella to operate on it; but there was no need of such aid on their arrival, for the door stood open, and Mrs. Tysoe's portly figure and chestnut wig more than filled up the opening, as she stood hospitably to receive them, having to retire gracefully and carefully backwards before any one else could enter the passage, and turn herself round in the shop before conducting the lodgers up the very steep stairs that

led to the sitting-room over the shop that was destined for their occupation.

The children were unfeignedly delighted with everything; with the paper on the walls of the passage and staircase, which represented a fox hunt and a huntsman leaping a five-barred gate, which, whenever the paper joined, presented interesting combinations of headless horses and mutilated dogs; with the beautifully cut yellow paper that protected the gilt of the looking glass; with the water lily under a glass shade that stood on the rather rickety table in the window; with the portrait of Mrs. Tysoe in her youth, in black satin and curls, which did not appear to the little girls at all the same color as her present coiffure; with the amber glass candlesticks on the mantlepiece, and with the hand-screens painted by Miss Tysoe at boarding school, with flowers of peculiar shape and unusual color.

The window commanded a fine view, as Mrs. Tysoe pointed out, of all that went on in the town, which at present seemed to be very little, as a dog stretched at full length in the sun in the very middle of the street was the only living thing visible, and conveyed the idea of the utter absence of any fear of being run over by a passing vehicle. "But on mar-

ket days," Mrs. Tysoe said "as is Fridays, it's surprising what a deal of coming and going there be."

The tea things were laid on the round table in the middle of the room, and Mrs. Tysoe left them to hasten the appearance of tea, after showing them their bedrooms, which lay at the back of the house—"over the cheese-room," as she told them, though Dick thought she might have saved herself the trouble, as the smell was quite sufficient to proclaim the fact.

The very smell was an additional attraction to the little girls and they could not in the least understand why Dick caught them both into his arms directly Mrs. Tysoe was gone and held them tightly to him and swallowed as if the smell of cheese were solid and he could not get it down. It was such a regular grown-up bedroom that the little girls were to have, with a feather bed and drab moreen curtains bound with pale green, and hooks behind the door to hang short frocks at a giddy height above the floor, and a washing stand that did not condescend to short stature like the one in the nursery at home, but raised the great heavy jug to such a distance above some people's heads as made it a serious question how it could ever be lifted down by two, or even four, little trembling hands.

Dick unstrapped their box for them, and, lifting

the lid, looked rather forlornly at the closely packed contents of mysterious little garments—frills and tucks and embroideries, and pink and blue ribbons—in which nurse's and Martha's skillful hands had arrayed his little sisters, and turned them out such dainty little ladies. Already even some of the trimness and crispness had gone from their appearance. Letty's face had a smear across it, and Sybil's hat was crushed in on one side, but they did not at all share in Dick's helpless dismay, but began at once dipping and burrowing into the box, and seemed so bustling and capable, that Dick left them to their own devices to get ready for tea, and heard such screams of laughter and running about and chattering that he felt any pity or assistance was quite uncalled for.

They were almost too busy to come in to tea, but when Dick threatened to begin pouring it out without them they made their appearance, though their toilettes were not quite complete, as one of Letty's shoes had got lost in the melee, and Sybil's hair was parted very much on one side. They had also forgotten their pinafores; but this, I think, was intentional—as a sign of their emancipation from nursery tyranny.

Letty was to pour out tea, but the big metal tea

pot was so heavy that Dick had to come to the rescue, as likewise he was obliged to do with the large black-handled knives and forks which, under the little girls' guidance, made magic passes at the mutton chops, without producing any effect on those substantial articles.

But it was all delightful—the whiff of brown sugar and bacon that pervaded everything; the tinkle of the little bell in the shop, when customers came from time to time; and the clacket of pattens on the pavement outside—all added to the charm. They had once had a toy given them representing a grocer's shop, with half-a-dozen little drawers containing rice and coffee, etc., and a counter with a very infirm pair of scales in which one coffee berry far outweighed all the tiny weights, and a wooden man with a red face and a white apron, on a stand behind the counter. But the stock-in-trade was soon eaten or otherwise disposed of, and nurse would not replace it, and they found beads and slate pencils were dull substitutes to make believe with. But here they were brought in contact with a real shop, and might, perhaps, be allowed sometimes to go behind the counter and scoop tea and sugar out of those inexhaustible stores, or poke the taster into

the very heart of a cheese, or pull down string from that patent sort of arrangement above the counter. There was no end to the possibilities that every whiff from the shop suggested to their lively imaginations; and they chattered away so fast that Dick had no time to feel melancholy or the children themselves to feel tired till tea was over, and all three established on the slippery horse-hair sofa, and Mrs. Tysoe was clearing away tea and talking to Dick. Then silence fell on the active little tongues, and first one head pressed against Dick's arm and then the other, and long lashes drooped over sleepy eyes, and Mrs. Tysoe's voice grew indistinct and very like nurse's, and sleep's magic hand wafted them in a second back to the old night nursery, without the aid of the jolting omnibus and third-class carriage; and when they heard some one say, "Let me put the little dears to bed, sir, as have had children of my own," they did not resent the indignity, as they might have done an hour before, but let Mrs. Tysoe lead them off and assist largely in their undressing, and at last lift them into the bed which seemed too high to be scaled by such weary little bodies, and finally tuck them up and give them each a loud, smacking kiss, which did a great deal to take away the forlorn-

ness which is apt to creep over any one when bed-time comes in new quarters.

There was no one to do the same by Dick even if it would have produced the same effect on him, so, being left to his own devices, he went out to have a look round and a pipe ; but the rain had come on and the Slowmill people seemed to go to bed early, and he came back feeling damp and depressed, and inclined to pity himself and to think of life as if it were one of those long straight roads to be found in France, leading on dull and monotonous, with only a heap of stones or a row of stiff poplars to break the dreary straight lines, till it is lost in the distance, instead of the pleasant up and down English road, dipping into shady valleys or mounting sunny heath-lands, crossing babbling streams, or winding through parks and woods and meadows—which most of our lives resemble, thank God ; or as if it were one bitter potion to be drained at a draught, instead of being, as it is, so mercifully divided into little daily doses, some of them bitter enough, no doubt, but many of them sweet even in the saddest lot.

He found Mr. Tysoe putting up his shutters, and that worthy man followed him upstairs under the pretence of showing him a bit of news in the *Slow-*

mill Gazette, which was several days old in the London papers, but really to have a little bit of gossip, which Mr. Tysoe dearly loved.

It was quite impossible to feel heroic or depressed in Joe Tysoe's presence, he was so sleek and smiling and pleased with himself and all the world. There is certainly something in the sale of cheese that produces a good effect on the temper and manners. Did you ever come across a surly, ill-tempered cheesemonger? I never did. They may be a trifle deceitful and flattering sometimes, but never cross-grained or sour.

He had a very pink complexion, and sandy hair brushed up into a cockatoo tuft, and light blue, twinkling, sympathetic eyes, and a mouth that watered and smacked constantly, as if the taste of that last prime Cheddar, or full-flavored Cheshire, lingered still on his palate. He had seen trouble, too, in his time, for his father had died when Joe was almost a boy, and had left his mother and two sisters to his care, and when his sisters had married he had taken to wife one of the Miss Fullers at the "George," and she had died after only two years of married bliss (that is her funeral card with a weeping willow and a broken column and a barrel-bodied urn on it, that is

framed and hangs over the mantelpiece in the parlor). That happened years ago, but Joe Tysoe does not seem inclined to give her a successor, though there is a great deal of giggling among the farmers' daughters who come into Slowmill on market days, and more subdued flutter among the young ladies of the congregation when Mr. Tysoe comes into chapel on Sunday evenings, in his black frock-coat and blue necktie.

"But," as he told Dick that first evening, "the late Mrs. Tysoe were an angel, and that sensitive as 'twere quite surprising. There's a many good points in the fair sex," said Mr. Tysoe, turning his head a little on one side, as if he were contemplating the beauties of a ripe Stilton, "but you don't often find 'em sensitive."

"Ah!" said Dick, surprised that Mr. Tysoe should have found the fair sex hard-hearted and impervious to his attractions, "perhaps you don't do them justice."

"Now the dear departed were a parable, that's what she were, and that sensitive over cheese as I'd trust her even afore myself; and often's the time as she's said, 'Joe,' says she, 'let them cheeses bide' or 'Take to him, Joe,' and she were always in the

right of it, and if that ain't being uncommon sensitive, I'd like to know what is," said Mr. Tysoe with proud conviction. "And when you shows me another fit to hold a candle to her, I'll show you the second Mrs. Tysoe."

CHAPTER VIII.

TIP CAT.

THERE was a great deal of dissent in Slowmill. The Tysoes, as I said in the last chapter, went to chapel, having been Wesleyans for several generations, and Mrs. Tysoe was a little vexed when she found that her new lodger intended to go to church, as she had pictured to herself conducting Dick and the little girls to their seat in the chapel, under the curious and admiring glances that would be cast at them, and the slight, but touching allusion to bereavement that Mr. Parkins, the minister, would introduce into his prayer at sight of the crape on the children's hats. Perhaps she would look over a hymn-book with Dick, and she would certainly hold a hand of each little girl as they went out of chapel. And so she felt quite disappointed when Dick declared his intention of going to church and taking Letty and Sybil with him; and she was still further annoyed to find that he had not upheld the honor

and glory of her lodgings, but had sat in one of the free seats among the snuffy old men from the almshouses, though half the pews in the church were empty, and though Mr. Thoyts, the ironmonger, invited him into his seat.

He also greatly shocked Mrs. Tysoe's prejudices by taking the little girls for a walk on Sunday afternoon. Dick was quite willing to fall in with all the arrangements of the house for the observance of the Sabbath, and made no complaint as to his bath remaining unemptied and his boots uncleaned, and he cheerfully partook of a scrupulously cold dinner without even a hot potato to relieve the frigidity of the meal; but he felt that a whole afternoon in the little sitting-room, with the smell of dinner hanging about and blending with the odors of the shop, and with the sun pouring in at the window, was more than he could stand. The American chair with the crochet antimacassar on the back, which was the only easy-chair in the room, was not conducive to sleep, and the newspapers he had brought with him had been carefully put away by Mrs. Tysoe, and a few volumes of the Tract Magazines put in their place, with Bunyan's *Holy War* to amuse the children.

So Dick told the little girls to put on their hats and come out for a turn, and as they passed the door of the parlor behind the shop, they ran the gauntlet of Mrs. Tysoe's disapproving glances as she sat at the table, very upright, in her Sunday cap, with a large Bible open before her, and Joe opposite, in his shirt-sleeves, with a red spotted handkerchief over his head, which nodded backwards and forwards in a spasmodic manner that threatened occasionally to dislocate his neck.

Outside, the street looked a little more lively than it had done the night before, as there were parties of children hurrying to the various dissenting Sunday schools, leaving a whiff of peppermint and hair-oil as they passed, and clusters of hobbledehoys, with shining faces and billycock hats, knocking their heels against the edge of the pavement, waiting to be taken in tow by the servant girls who came waggling along in all the glories of their Sunday out, and with whom they pair off and spend all the afternoon, walking out of step and hardly speaking a word, but apparently to their mutual satisfaction.

Dick and the little girls soon left these interesting couples and Slowmill itself behind them, and taking the first turning from the main road that looked in-

teresting, went along a winding road under great elm trees, whose branches met and interlaced overhead, which, in summer, must have cast a thick shade, but now only made a delicate lacework against the pale blue February sky, and let the sunlight through in patches on the sandy road and on the glossy ivy in the hedge.

This road brought them, after a time, to a pretty lodge and a park gate, through which Letty and Sybil were anxious to turn, but Dick persuaded them to come further, and they were rewarded by coming to a stile and a footpath that led them to a delightful little wood, through which a stream ran, crossed by a plank bridge. The stream was clear, and showed the rich brown oak-leaves lying in layers at the bottom, and the little girls found an interesting family of frogs on the bank, who, they intuitively understood, required assistance to reach the water; so Dick sat down on the plank to wait till this manœuvre was accomplished, dropping pebbles slowly into the stream, which caused a rippling eddy on the smooth surface, a momentary disturbance on the oak leaf carpet, and a little cloud of mud to rise in the water. and then the pebble disappeared and the water was clear again.

That idle occupation of dropping pebbles, and a shaft of sunlight that came through the trees on the water, had combined to conjure up a vision of the river at Commemoration time, and a picnic at Nuneham, and a girl's face that had smiled at him through a pleasant sunny afternoon, and that had grown a little pensive and thoughtful as the moon rose over the beeches and turned the oars silver as they gently dipped and rose. Kathie, she was called, Kathie Dumbleton, and her cousin Jack had been Dick's great chum.

Dick had had a good many flirtations in his time, very innocent, harmless episodes, that had not cost a wakeful night or a heartache to either of the parties concerned, and his feeling for Kathie Dumbleton had only been a shade or two more intense than for half-a-dozen others, and most likely would soon have been superseded by as many more but for the sudden change in his fortunes, which had taken him clear out of the way of temptation of the kind, and had accordingly deepened the last impression made on his susceptible fancy, till it threatened to touch his heart and become indelible.

Jack had taken his degree and gone out to India the year before, having some good civil appointment,

so he had heard nothing as yet of Dick's sudden change of circumstances, and perhaps never might, for Dick was a poor correspondent at the best of times, and had not the heart now to write and say how entirely all his prospects in life were altered.

"She will go to Commemoration," Dick told himself, "and some other fellow will row her up the river, and put on her shawl, and all the rest of it, confound him! and she won't even remember the existence of poor Dick Lucas, or if she does, and the fellows tell her how I have come to grief, she will say——"

"I'll trouble you to get out of the road."

Dick was rudely awakened from his day-dream by a rough, imperious voice, and became aware that a tall man was standing close by, waiting to cross the bridge. His appearance by no means justified the commanding tone of his voice, for his shabby velveteen coat and gaiters looked like a gamekeeper's, and his big hob-nailed shoes like a ploughboy's, and the felt hat he wore was so battered and weather-stained that a scarecrow might have been ashamed of it. He had a long, untrimmed, grey moustache and deep-set eyes of a light color unusual with such a dark complexion, which gave a sort of wolfish ex-

pression to his face as he stood looking down at Dick, an expression which was strangely repeated in the face of the big, rough, surly-looking sheep-dog at his heels.

Dick scrambled to his feet to make way for him with, "I beg your pardon, sir," and lifted his hat, for in spite of the man's shabby clothes and his rough, countrified accent, he recognized the new comer as a gentleman.

"You'll be good enough to tell Mrs. Vivian that this path is private," went on the tall man, "and not part of the park."

"I shall be happy to take any message, but I have not the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Vivian."

"Ain't you stopping at Tipton Grange?"

"I never heard of such a place."

"Well, where on earth do you come from then?"

Dick was beginning to get a little nettled at the man's hectoring manner. "That," he said, "is my business. If this is a private path, and I am trespassing, I can only say I did not know it and go some other way. Sybil! Letty!" he called, "I'm going back. Are you ready?"

"Oh, Dick, wait a minute, there are four more frogs with such poor, dry, dusty bodies."

"Never mind the frogs. I can't wait."

"We won't be a minute, really we won't, but they will go hopping off quite the wrong way, and Sybil don't like taking them up under their arms, they're so awfully soft. And Dick, may we take one darling little one home with us? It's the smallest little frog, and we're afraid it's lost its mother, and we could keep it in our bedroom."

Letty came climbing up the steep bank from the stream as she spoke, with her face turned up so bright and smiling and entreating, that Dick found it a hard matter to say a decided no and tell her to fetch Sybil at once and say good-by to the frogs.

"But you'll bring us back another day to see how they're getting on; there's one we've called Uncle Tom because he's so like, and we think he's got the gout, so we may come back another day soon, mayn't we?"

"No," said Dick, "we must find another place for frogs, for this is private, and we're trespassing?"

"You needn't be in such a hurry," growled the man, who had been standing silently on the bridge looking down at the child with those strange light eyes of his. "If you're not visitors at the Grange it don't matter. If I don't look sharply after them I

shouldn't have a bit of peace or privacy. I've had gushing young ladies sketching my old house, though it's so ugly they couldn't make it worse even in those things they call sketches; and jackanapes of young men shooting right into my poultry yard, and fishing in my duck-pond—the idiots! And prying women taking refuge from a thunderstorm and poking their noses all over my place, and the old lady herself sending to ask my advice and borrow my horses. I flatter myself I've taught them better by this time, but when I saw you there I thought madam was up to some of her old tricks again."

"Well," said Dick, "I'm just going. Come, Letty." For Letty was gravely regarding the old man with a sort of fascinated curiosity, a scrutiny that was returned by the deep-set eyes above, while every now and then they turned a quick look at Dick as if they were comparing the two faces and seeking something in both.

"Didn't I say you needn't be in such a hurry? What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't say."

The man gave a jerk of irritation to his shoulders, but just then a scream from Sybil interrupted the conversation.

"Oh, Dick! Letty! Dick! there's a horrid great ugly dog, and he's killed one of the frogs. Go away! Go away! Oh Dick!"

Letty and Dick both flew to the rescue, followed by the man from whose side the sheep-dog had disappeared a moment before unnoticed, and they found Sybil pushing away the creature's great grizzly head with all her might, while he looked at her with much the same curious look in his light eyes that his master had given to Letty.

A whistle from his master called the dog away in a second, and Sybil soon regained her composure, and Dick pronounced the frog, though flattened, not past all hope of recovery if put at once into the water and left in perfect quiet; and as in the meantime the other frogs had hopped away, Letty and Sybil agreed to go back without further delay.

But as they came out on to the road across the stile Letty fell back to pick some red and yellow ivy leaves, and Dick, looking round, saw that the old man had followed them and was speaking to her.

"Letty, Letty!" he called, and she ran on, turning at the stile to nod and wave her hand to the strange looking couple, master and dog, standing watching her.

"What did he say to you?"

"He asked what my name was and I told him, and he said it was a pretty name and that we might come and see the frogs whenever we like, and that if we go on through the wood we shall come to his house, and he has some young ducks and lots of things to show us. And then I asked what his name was, and he said—what do you think, Dick? such a funny name—'Tip Cat.'"

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEW LIFE.

Mr. Burgess's house was a large, dull, red-brick house in High Street, and his offices lay behind, opening out of a little steep side-street, with a flour mill and some stables just opposite. You had to go up a narrow flight of wooden stairs to reach the offices, which were on the first floor, and at the top found yourself in the outer office, where the office boy and Mr. Macintosh sat, and out of this led Mr. Lupton's room and Mr. Burgess's, the latter of which communicated with the house.

Mr. Lupton was the head clerk of whom Mr. Murchison had spoken as managing most of the business, and in his room Dick was to sit, except when Mr. Burgess wanted him.

Dick did not find either Mr. Lupton or Mr.

Macintosh inclined to received him very warmly, or to do much to put him in the way of his new work; for the latter had quite counted on taking Fred Burgess's place, and felt himself aggrieved and passed over when, as he said, "a chap from London was put over his head who knew no more of business than a baby, and gave himself all the airs of a swell."

Mr. Lupton's disinclination to Dick was from a different cause. Young Mr. Fred, as the nephew was called in the office and in Slowmill generally, had carried on a strong flirtation with Bessie Lupton, the old clerk's pretty daughter, and wild and dissipated as old Lupton knew the young man to be he had encouraged the flirtation, and built on it a day dream of the future when Mr. Fred would have succeeded his uncle in the business, and his Bessie would be mistress of the red-brick house adjoining, and Burgess and Lupton would be the name on the door-plate.

With this end in view he had put up with much from Mr. Fred, with a great deal of insolence and personal rudeness, as well as with his unpunctuality and want of attention to business, sometimes staying on himself after hours to make up for the work the young man had neglected, while Mr. Fred was play-

ing billiards at the *Swan*, or away at coursing matches with some of the fast young farmers in the neighborhood, and more than once he had lent him some money when he was in difficulties and had exhausted his uncle's patience. But it had all led to nothing but disappointment and vexation and loss; Bessie was broken-hearted, his money was gone, and Mr. Burgess was inclined to lay some of the blame on him. You may be sure that after this Mr. Lupton was not inclined to be indulgent to Dick, especially as Dick was a very different style to Mr. Fred, and did not show the slightest inclination to console Bessie's broken heart—which, I fancy, was quite open to consolation.

Mr. Burgess was disposed to like Dick, Mr. Murchison had spoken so strongly in his favor, and he was so gentlemanly and respectful in his manner, and so patient during the long hours of copying and writing from dictation, over which his nephew had fumed and fidgeted, and he was not always pulling out his watch or whistling under his breath or drawing on the blotting paper, as Fred had done; and the only fault to be found at all was his tendency to look out of window when seven o'clock approached to see if his two little sisters had come to

meet him, as they generally did; and the only occasion on which he suggested that it was time to leave off, was one wet evening, when a large umbrella was to be seen standing patiently at the corner very near the ground and sent whirling round when any one passed by and knocked against it.

"Of course," Mr. Burgess told himself, "it is a case of new broom at present, and by the time he gets to know every worthless young scamp in the place it will be a very different matter."

But Dick did not seem inclined to make friends; he had made heaps at Oxford, and some might have objected to him there, that he was not very particular. On the whole, I think it was more by good fortune than by discrimination that he had known a good set, for any one who was good-natured and liked him, he liked in return; but now the change in his fortunes seemed to have made him more fastidious. Certainly he had no fancy for the company in the *Swan*—the sporting doctor, Dr. Lee, and his partner Mr. Shore, and the two managing clerks at the brewery and two or three at the bank. They all called themselves gentlemen, though Mr. Murchison said there were no gentlemen in Slowmill, and Dick was inclined to think he was more correct in his estimate

than they were, and he responded so coolly to their civilities that they very soon set him down as a stuck-up prig, and left him to himself.

The Miss Shores, of whom there were five, who spent most of their time in walking up and down High Street, or looking out of window, and the Miss Allens, the mill-owner's daughters, tried their fascinations on Dick in vain, and he ran the gauntlet of the Shores' windows without turning a hair, and even met the five in their most elaborate toilets, walking abreast, with no more interest than if they had been five charity children or five perambulators.

Something of Dick's story had crept out in Slowmill, and the young ladies of the town agreed that it was quite romantic and like a novel, and that he must be awfully interesting, and for the first few days it was wonderful how many occasions for calling at Mr. Tysoe's shop arose, or how often they were passing Mr. Burgess's just when office hours were over and Dick coming out. But he presented such an impenetrable front of indifference that they soon grew discouraged, and, as a fresh clerk appeared at the bank the following week, of a more susceptible nature than Dick, they gave the latter up as a bad job, declaring that he was really too low, as he had

been seen sitting in the parlor behind the shop, smoking a pipe with the grocer, and he actually let those little girls ride about in Tysoe's cart!

They had not the intelligence to attack Dick through his little sisters. I think kindness to them would have covered a multitude of vulgarities, curled fringes, waggling crinolettes, and country-town airs and graces; and the Tysoes won Dick's heart altogether, for Mrs. Tysoe took the children at once into her motherly care, while the little grocer seemed never tired of their society, and found them endless occupation and amusement.

The first morning, when Dick went off to the office he left them with a very heavy heart. One day had been enough to make him sick to death of that little sitting-room with nothing to do, and he judged the children's feelings by his own; but he might have spared the pity he expended on them, for when he came in at dinner time, he found they had had a most delightful morning, as busy as bees, with Mr. Tysoe, unpacking a large case of goods that had just arrived from Bristol, grinding coffee, nipping white sugar into lumps, and turning cheeses, and they besieged him with entreaties to let them go for a drive in the afternoon with Mr. Tysoe.

Three times a week, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays, Mr. Tysoe's cart drove round Slowmill and its neighborhood to deliver parcels and to call for orders. It was a high spring cart with red wheels, and it was drawn by a large rawboned gray horse, with big hairy feet, and a patient, long-suffering temper, and having legs usually adorned with knee-caps, either for the prevention or cure of broken knees. On other occasions this horse did duty in the omnibus to and from the station; so Tysoe's cart, even when most loaded with parcels, must have seemed easy work, especially under Tysoe's gentle driving, with long intervals of rest and a mouthful of grass at the various houses and farms while Tysoe indulged in gossip and mild flirtations with the inmates.

Dick felt rather a qualm when he was asked by Letty and Sybil to give his consent to their going for a drive, and Mrs. Tysoe herself hardly thought it was the proper thing to do; but the children were so urgent, and the afternoon so bright, and there was no one to take them for a walk, as Mrs. Tysoe had to keep the shop while her son was absent, that Dick could not find it in his heart to say no, and, later in the afternoon, he caught a glimpse from the office

window of the cart as it stopped to deliver a parcel at Mr. Burgess's back door, with Letty holding the reins and Sybil the whip, and Tysoe sitting between beaming with good-nature.

Dick could not help wondering what Aunt Maria would say if she could see them; but they looked so thoroughly pleased and delighted that he made up his mind that he would not worry about it, and that as long as they kept well and happy he would be content for the present.

As to their being happy, there was no doubt about that. Their life in Bedford Place when Dick was away, had been, in spite of its comfort, very monotonous, and everything at Slowmill was new and deeply interesting to them, and they chattered away all tea-time, and afterwards, with such bright eyes and flushed cheeks that Dick thought they would be too excited to sleep, till he looked into their room half an hour after Mrs. Tysoe had carried them off, and saw them fast asleep under the shade of the stuffy moreen curtains.

They had so much to tell Dick of their drive, and of the grey horse, which, from all accounts, was a marvel of spirit and speed, and which Mr. Tysoe had let them both drive. They had called at Tipton

Grange and several other gentlemen's houses, and described them all entirely from a back-door point of view. There was a very nice cook at one place who was making tarts, and brought them each out one ; and there was a parrot in one kitchen, and a fierce dog in another, who broke his chain once, and tried to bite Mr. Tysoe. The little girls evidently thought that the servants were the real masters and mistresses of the houses, and I dare say they were not always very wide of the mark.

But the farms were the nicest places to go to, cheese farms with great sweet-smelling dairies, with milk-tins as bright, and shelves as white, and bricks as red and damp as tins and shelves and bricks can be, and as rubbing and scrubbing and washing can make them, and long, cool cheese rooms with rows of cheeses, some of them just out of the press, soft and moist, and others more hardened characters.

The roads to these farms were through meadows where large, white-faced, long-horned cows were feeding, and there was generally a yard full of grunting little pigs, or troops of gobbling turkeys, or something equally interesting and instructive. At each farm the children were hospitably welcomed, and refreshment of one kind or another offered—a drink of cool

whey, or a crusty bit of home-baked bread, hot from the oven, or a waxy yellow apple that had stood all the winter on the turned-up wine glasses on the shelf in the best parlor.

"And who do you think we saw, Dick?" Sybil ended. "Dont tell him, Letty, let him guess. Some one you know."

Dick's heart beat a little quicker. Could any one he knew have turned up, a ghost out of the old life, and have seen the children driving about in the cart, and perhaps asked questions, and wondered and pitied?

"Who was it?" he asked. "I'm bad at guessing."

"It begins with a T, doesn't it, Letty? and he had some one with him beginning with a——What does Kaiser begin with, Letty?"

"I give it up, Syb; I'm bad at spelling."

"Why, Tip Cat to be sure, and Kaiser's his dog."

CHAPTER X.

WEEKLY BILLS.

"WHO is this man, Tip Cat, the children talk of?" asked Dick, one evening.

It was that evening towards the end of the first week, when some Argus eye had detected him smoking a pipe with Joe Tysoe in the parlor behind the shop.

"Well, he's a queer customer," said Mr. Tysoe; "and it's queer too your asking about him just now, as he were in the shop not half an hour before you come in from Burgess's, asking much the same about you—where you come from, how your name was spelt, and goodness knows what all; and when I tells you as he ain't been in the town, to my knowledge, for nigh upon five years, you may be bound he's up to something."

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to him," said Dick;

"but I don't see what business it is of his. Who is he?"

"Well of course, his name ain't really Tip Cat, though every one calls him so, and I didn't know as he was aware of it till he told little Miss as that were his name. Squire Tipton Cathcart is his name by rights, and all the Tipton property belongs to him, though he chooses to let it all and live in a little farm like a helmet. The old squire were a very different sort. It were before my time, but I've often heard tell of him; he had a pack of hounds, and kep' the whole place alive with a house always full of company, and plenty of goings on. He was thrown in the hunting field and killed, when this here Tip Cat, as they call him, was only a lad; so the place was let till he come of age, and the property were to be nursed up for him a bit, as the old squire had run through a lot of money in his time. But when he come of age he let the place again for seven years, and when these was over there was a great talk of his coming back, and folks said the good old times of Slowmill was coming back along with him. But all of a sudden we heard as the place was to be let again. There were all sorts of stories afloat about it; some would have it as he'd lost his money

at cards, and some as his lawyer had made off with it, and some as the young lady he wanted had jilted him. I don't think no one knew the real rights of it, but anyhow the Grange was let again, and, after another few years, he come back and settled in the little home farm, with not a soul but an old corporal from his regiment, who does all the work about the place, for he won't have a petticoat inside his doors —which favors the tale as he'd been served bad by some young lady. He won't have nothing to do with his neighbors; he farms a little of his land, and keeps a nice little bit of shooting, and is out with the hounds most days. I calls there twice a week with the groceries they use, which ain't much, but it's not once in six months as I sees Tip Cat himself, but only old Ridge, a surly old ruffian as ever breathed; but on Monday, as luck would have it, just as we drives up to the gate up comes Tip Cat, with his gun in his hand. I were just going to tell the little Missies not to take no notice, as he don't like to be looked at, and speaks rough now and then if he's put out, when Miss Letty, she sings out, 'How de do, Tip Cat!' says she, 'is this where you live?' I was just took all of a heap, and I'd a good mind to drive right off before he'd time to get in a

rage ; but he took off his hat to the children as grand as milord, and said, ' Yes,' says he, ' this is my house. Are you come to see the ducks ? ' ' No, not to-day,' said Miss Letty, very important, as if she'd all the business in the world on her shoulders, ' we're busy. We've a lot of places to call at, and we've brought you some mustard and black lead, nothing nice, but we'll come another day if you like.' I had to get out to take the parcels up to the door, and old Ridge was looking out some bottles as he wanted me to take back, so I was kep' a minute or two, and all the time I could hear the children chattering away to Tip Cat, and he answering back gruff, but kind and friendly like, leaning on the wall and looking at them as if he couldn't take his eyes off them, or as if he was taking their photographs, and his dog was sitting up on the wall close against him, staring just every bit the same. I'd never had such a near look at them before, and they are a queer-looking couple as ever I set eyes on ; but it's plain he've took a fancy to the little Missies, and especially to Miss Letty—and no wonder ? " said Mr. Tysoe, " bless their dear little hearts ! It was too wet for the children to come along of me this afternoon, and they was disappointed, but mother, she let 'em help

in the shop, weighing out quarters of tea against Friday, and they was as good as gold, only they always wants to put a pinch too much, as don't answer when you've got to make a profit. Tip Cat was on the look out for them all the same, though he couldn't have thought I'd have brought them out raining cats and dogs; and this evening he comes tramping in, as I told you, and asks no end of questions, the main of them as I couldn't answer, and he left word as how he'd be glad to see you and the little ladies on Sunday if you liked to walk that way. I didn't say nothing about it before the mother," Joe Tysoe went on, lowering his voice as that lady's substantial tread sounded on the staircase, "as don't hold with visiting on the Sabbath. No more don't I," added Joe, trying to assume a severe and Puritanical expression; "but I've heard tell as there's a deal of that sort of thing in London, and if you're used to a thing it don't seem so wrong."

Dick was inclined to resent Tip Cat's curiosity about him and the children, and he was rather glad when Letty and Sybil decided on going a different way on Sunday afternoon, to a lane where they had seen some early primroses.

On Saturday afternoon Mr. Burgess asked Dick

if he would like to have his salary paid weekly or quarterly. Dick had been wondering how this would be all the week; he had a little money in hand for present use, but he had told Mrs. Tysoe that he would like to settle the bill weekly, and though she said it did not signify and it was all the same to her, he thought she would prefer it. But this was only to be done by receiving the salary weekly, and it went so very much against the grain to do this that when Mr. Burgess asked the question, Dick answered, "Thank you, sir, quarterly if you please," and then grew very red and hot and made several mistakes in the writing he was doing from dictation, and at last burst out, "I beg your pardon, sir, but if it's all the same to you, I should prefer having my money weekly."

"Whichever you please, whichever you please; it makes no difference to me. I will tell Mr. Lupton to let you have it weekly."

Dick had been hoping that Mr. Burgess himself would make the payments, as Mr. Lupton took every opportunity of being disagreeable to him, and now took pains to let him know that his predecessor, Mr. Fred, had received his money quarterly like a gentleman, as he, Mr. Lupton, himself did; and Dick went home fingering the coins in his waistcoat

pocket and feeling hot and humiliated, as if he had sunk to the level of the laboring men who passed him, slouching along with their wallets on their shoulders, carrying their week's earnings to the missus and turning in at the *Swan* to drink the first twopence out of it. "After all," he said to himself, "there's no shame in being poor. It's the first money I've earned, anyhow, and, by Jove! I think I've worked for it honestly."

"You'll let me have your bill, Mrs. Tysoe," he said that night, "on Monday morning? I should like to pay regularly every week."

"I'll just get Joe to make it out then," she answered, "he always balances his books a Saturday night, and I've got it all down on the slate. Shall I put in the washing along with the rest?"

"Yes please; and that reminds me, Mrs. Tysoe, do you think you can find a better laundress? I can't wear the shirts she has sent home. I don't know what on earth she's been doing to the fronts, and as for the collars, they're so limp that I put on half-a-dozen this morning before I found one I could wear. I don't know how she's done the children's things, but perhaps she's more used to that sort of thing than shirts."

"Well," Mrs. Tysoe said, "she's a respectable, honest body as ever lived, is Eliza Dawes, and a widder woman and a long family and attends our chapel reg'lar. A Christian woman; but, in course, if she don't give satisfaction we must try Mrs. Jones as washes for Dr. Lee, and were laundry-maid for years at the Grange. She ain't a woman as I likes, but she've done a deal of washing for gentle-folks, and knows how to charge I've heard tell."

"We musn't be extravagant, Mrs. Tysoe," said Dick, "but it's no economy to pay very little for washing shirts if you can't wear them when they're done. If Mr. Tysoe has time to make out the account this evening will you let me have it? I shall not be going to bed just yet."

An hour later Mrs. Tysoe tapped at the door and brought in the bill, startling Dick, who had the coins, given him that afternoon by Mr. Lupton, spread before him on the table. He was looking at them with a sort of curiosity and wonder as to whether this money, earned by the sweat of his brow, could be of the same metal and stamp as the coin of which he had made so light in old days, it looked so different to the sovereigns and half-sovereigns that had slipped

through his fingers so quickly and easily at Oxford and in London.

"I don't think you'll have to complain," Mrs. Tysoe said as she laid the folded paper down on the table. "I've kep' all the items down, and I've always been counted a goodish manager."

"I'm sure I shall not," said Dick cheerfully; "you've made us awfully comfortable, and we can't have been extravagant."

When Mrs. Tysoe had gone away, Dick opened the bill and looked at the total, and then ran his fingers quickly through his hair and caught up his pen and added up the column and then examined the items. Yes, they were all of them correct, and none of them, as far as he could tell, overcharged. He could remember that neck of mutton and that steak, and the apples, sugar, potatoes, milk, and all the rest of it, and the addition was all right, and the total a month ago he would have thought wonderfully moderate for a whole week's living for himself, let alone the little girls; but it was more than his week's salary would pay, more than was comfortable to an income of 80*l.* a year.

He could pay it, for, as I have said, he had a little money in hand from the sale of his Oxford be-

longings; but he had put that by as a sort of reserve, only to be drawn on in times of need, and, if possible, added to with a view to schooling for the children; and the worst of it was he did not see how the expenses were to be lessened another week. He had been inclined to complain once or twice during the week on the subject of the plainness and want of variety in the fare—more for the children's sake than his own—and he could not think what things they could possibly do without, so as to bring the figure down to that 1*l.* 10*s.* that he had been admiring as his first earnings.

Anyhow, one thing was clear, that he could not afford to be fastidious over his shirts and collars, and it was quite a relief to him to get up and go into his bedroom and carefully pick out the collars he had rejected so scornfully that morning, and flatten out their limp edges and put them back in his drawer, to be worn when he had come to an end of his better-washed linen.

Then he went back to that fruitless adding up in the hope of reducing the amount; but it was no good, and at last he fetched his poor little reserve store and made up the required sum, and, hearing the Tysoes still about, he went down, feeling

that he should sleep better if the matter were off his mind.

The Tysoes were having a late bit of supper with some toasted cheese, which made the little parlor smell like a mouse-trap, when Dick opened the door, and Mr. Tysoe, with many apologies for taking such a liberty, invited Dick to sit down and take a bit, "as is a first-rate toaster and done to a turn."

But the bill had taken all Dick's appetite away, so he declined with thanks, and said he was sorry to disturb them, and put the bill and the little pile of money on the table by the mustard-pot.

"I have rather a head-ache," he said, "to-night; and that reminds me, Mrs. Tysoe, I think I should be better without any beer at dinner and supper, and I don't care for anything but bread and butter for my breakfast."

"Perhaps you're a bit bilious," said Mrs. Tysoe; "and some folks as is that way inclined can't take not even a egg with their breakfast were it ever so; but I'll get you a nice bloater for a change, and if you finds the beer sits too heavy, I'd try just a leetle drop of brandy and water, and I've some pills as I've always kep' by me, as saved my poor 'usban' times out of mind from yeller jaundice; and it's my firm

conviction if he'd atook 'em in his last illness, he might abeen here to this very day."

But Dick thought the bill had been enough of a pill for one day, and that it must be a very patent medicine to cure a pain in the pocket; so he declined Mrs. Tysoe's course of treatment, and left them to finish their toasted cheese in peace.

CHAPTER XI.

TIPTON FARM.

It was a beautiful Spring that year, and though the country round Slowmill is not particularly pretty or picturesque, it is a rare country for wild flowers, and, to Sybil and Letty who had always been in London at that time of the year, it was like fairyland as they followed the bright footsteps of the Spring through violets and primroses, and soft springing grass and dainty opening leaves and grey velvet willow buds, and thrushes' nests with warm, blue eggs, and young lambs frisking on thick, young legs, and fragile, pure anemones, and bluebells as blue as the sky above, where the larks were singing, and dewy cowslips, and the cuckoo's cheerful notes, till the meadows burst into a blaze of golden buttercups to welcome King Summer.

The little girls were quite happy. When Mr. Tysoe was going out, he always took them in his cart and set them down at some wood, or meadow,

or lane where there were flowers or nests or lambs, and picked them up on his return, and brought them home. On the days when he was not driving, Mrs. Tysoe used at first to take them out, but this the children found dull, as she preferred to keep to the pavements where she was likely to meet friends and acquaintances, and she walked very slowly, and a walk into the country did not at all fit in with her ideas of enjoyment; so, on one occasion, when Mrs. Tysoe was indulging in a long gossip with a neighbor, and the little girls had grown tired of the only shop window within reach, which was an undertaker's, they took the law into their own hands and walked off independently along the road past the church, and made their way triumphantly to the very wood where they had gone the first Sunday with Dick, and where they had first met Tip Cat; and here, as good fortune would have it, they met Tip Cat again, and he took them on to his house, Tipton Farm, and regaled them with biscuits and milk, and showed them the young ducks and the calves and a family of pink-eyed, crafty ferrets; and they passed altogether a most delightful afternoon, while poor Mrs. Tysoe was tearing about Slowmill, quite distracted at not being able to find them.

She was just on her way to Mr. Burgess's to break the alarming news to Dick, and to ask if the duck-pond by the churchyard had better be dragged, or the town crier sent out to proclaim their loss, when the two culprits appeared, having been conducted back as far as the town by Corporal Ridge, having received a cordial invitation from Tip Cat to come to Tipton Farm as often as they pleased, and having made up their minds to avail themselves of the invitation very often.

They were very sorry when they found how frightened and anxious Mrs. Tysoe had been, and still more when Dick was told of what they had done, and was vexed and worried about it.

"I thought I could trust you, Letty," he said, "and that I need not feel uneasy when I am at the office—and now I shall always be thinking you are wandering about the country by yourselves, and that you may get lost or run over. And poor Mrs. Tysoe is quite ill with running about to find you."

The two little girls were crying, you may be sure, long before Dick came to the end of his very mild scolding, and were on his knees, and clinging round his neck sobbing in deepest contrition.

"Oh, Dick, we're so sorry, we'll never do such a

naughty thing again if you'll only trust us; and we went very steady, indeed we did, Dick, and when we heard a cart coming we climbed down quite into the ditch, not to be run over, and I took hold of Sybil's hand, and we walked quite slow and didn't run at all —but we won't never do it again, dear Dick, we won't if you'll only forgive us this once."

Poor Dick, it was himself he could not forgive, that he was not able to take better care of his little sisters, could not keep them in the position to which they were born, could not even keep down the weekly bills within the limits of his income. Those weekly bills were a perfect nightmare to poor Dick, and Saturday night, a time to be dreaded all through the week. Do what he would, the amount to be paid was always a little over what he received, and every week he had to draw from the small store which dwindled very rapidly under those weekly calls.

He could not blame Mrs. Tysoe in any way, her charges were certainly moderate and she was scrupulously honest, and there was nothing approaching extravagance that could be curtailed. Every week he hoped that the next bill might be less, but it always turned out that if they had saved in one item they had spent more in proportion on another. He could

not bear to stint or deny the children in the least, and he felt miserable if they did not eat as much as usual, or did not seem to like what was provided for them.

As for himself, he was so young and strong and hearty, that even his unusually sedentary life and his nervous anxiety to make two ends meet, could not spoil his appetite, and he made such ravages on the bread and butter as made him look very ruefully at the loaf and pat when tea time was over.

Do what he would, he could not impress on Mrs. Tysoe how desperately poor they were; when he said how necessary it was for them to be careful over every penny they spent, he always said it with a smile, and she fancied it was half a joke; and the bill was paid so regularly every Saturday night and no objection made to any of the charges, and when he left off this or that little luxury it was always on the plea that he would be better without it, and he was such a gentleman, and so unsuspicious and generous! She had had many lodgers far better off than Dick who had carped over and criticised every item in the bill and had locked up every available article of food in the cheffonier—as is the way of certain wise people, who do not seem to consider that if a lodging-house

keeper is dishonest it is very easy to have two keys to any cupboard door in the house.

So though Mrs. Tysoe managed her best for Dick and the little girls, she did not realize how poor they were, which made it all the harder for him in his attempts to economise.

Letty and Sybil went down that evening with very tearful eyes to beg Mrs. Tysoe's pardon, and finding her quite recovered from her agitation and temporary displeasure, and engaged in filling up the glass bottles of sweets for the shop window, the peace was very soon made, and they remained to help her in her congenial occupation, while Dick upstairs was fretting over that most fruitful source of worry —ways and means.

When Dick came in to dinner next day, he found a letter begun in large print, and Letty's fingers very inky. She was, as Aunt Maria had said, very backward, and this was the first letter she had ever attempted.

"dear tip cat," it ran, "sibel and me is not coming," and there a large blot seemed to have discouraged the attempt.

"I told him, you know," Letty said, "that we'd come and see him very often, for he gave us each a

little yellow duck, and they're too small to leave their mother, so I thought I ought to write and tell him we couldn't ever come again unless you or Mr. Tysoe could take us, and we should like the ducks called Punch and Judy, and we don't want them to go into the water till we come. Oh, Dick, I wish I could write. Ellen and Grace could write, with nice little curly tails to their g's, and dots to their i's."

"I wish you could, Letty. I'll teach you of an evening," said the poor young fellow, with another sharp sting of remorse for all his short-comings; "and, if you like, I'll write to Tip Cat for you when I come home this evening."

But there was no need to write, for that afternoon, when Letty and Sybil were out with Mr. Tysoe in the cart, they met Tip Cat, so they were able to explain the difficulties.

"Dick says we ain't to come by ourselves, and Mrs. Tysoe can't walk so far because she's got corns, and they're dreadful painful. Dick says he don't mind bringing us sometimes on Sunday afternoon, though he can't think why we want to come, though we told him about the ducks, and he says he's quite sure you'd rather we kept away. Would you, really, Tip Cat?"

"He needn't trouble himself to come on Sunday afternoons," was the gruff answer, "or any other afternoon for the matter of that; and if he'll take the trouble to ask any one about here, they'll tell him I'm not in the habit of asking people who I'd rather kept away."

"But we can't come if he doesn't," said Sybil.

"Yes you can, if you want to. The corporal comes into town every day to fetch my paper about two, and I'll tell him to call in and see if you want an escort, and we'll see you safe home when you've had enough of it."

So the very next day, when Dick was coming out after dinner, taking the short cut through the shop as he was rather late, there he found Corporal Ridge standing very stiff and upright, with his heels together, and he gave a military salute and told Dick that the captain had sent him for the young ladies.

But Dick received no more invitations to Tipton Farm, and saw nothing of Tip Cat, though the children often went there twice or three times a week. Now and then when they were late home, for, as the evenings grew longer, Dick sometimes reached home before them, he would walk out on the road to Tipton Grange to meet them, and then he would catch

a glimpse of the tall figure of the old man walking between the little girls with his head bent down, listening to their chatter as they held his hands, or clung to his arm or his shabby velveteen coat but, when Dick came in sight, and it was wonderful how far away Letty and Sybil could see him, Tip Cat would say good-by, and, turn back, while Kaiser would follow the children till they were safe with Dick, as if he felt his responsibility was not over till they were in Dick's hands, and then would go bounding off after his master.

"Tip Cat likes us both very much," Sybil would say; "but he likes Letty the best, because she is like some one he knew ever so long ago, whose name was Letty too. But the corporal likes me the best, so that makes us equal."

CHAPTER XII.

WAYS AND MEANS.

With what different eyes people look at things at different times!—or do the things themselves change and alter and take other shapes and lines? Three months before, Dick had looked round the little sitting-room at Mr. Tysoe's with disgust and discontent, as being insufferably small, and mean, and vulgar, and he had pitied the little girls, infinitely more than they needed his pity, for being reduced to this as their home; and he had only reconciled himself to it with the idea that it was only for a time, and that, by and by, when he saw where he was, he would find other quarters more suited to their position.

But now, as he looked round the room one Saturday night in June, it looked to him quite pretty and home-like and pleasant. It was a very hot night and the window was wide open, and a great, white

moon was looking calmly down on Slowmill, where perfect quiet reigned in the streets, and where, one by one, the lights were being extinguished in the bedroom windows, for it was nearly twelve o'clock.

There was not a breath of air stirring to move the window curtains or make Dick's candle flicker. Letty and Sybil had been in bed for hours, and he had been into their room and seen them asleep, with Letty's arm stretched across Sybil in a protecting fashion. He had heard the Tysoes go up to bed—Mrs. Tysoe very heavy-footed, with a grunt on each step, and Joe brisk and active even after a long and hot day's work.

Dick had been sitting for a long time with his elbows on the table and his hands supporting his head, and with a paper spread on the table in front of him, before he raised his head and took a survey of the room round him, partly in candle-light, partly in moonlight. There was hardly any alteration in the room; it was just the same as it was three months ago, when it had so disgusted him, except that perhaps it was a little less stiff and more untidy; a great straggling bunch of honeysuckle in a large jar had usurped the place of the wax water-lily in the window. Letty's hat lay on one of the chairs, and

a row of paper dolls adorned the sofa, and two long, lustrous peacock's feathers were stuck in the frame of the looking-glass and drooped gracefully across the little mirror. Otherwise it was just the same, and the portrait of Mrs. Tysoe ogled him with the very wooden grin which had made him so angry at first, that he had stuck a patch of sticking-plaster over those senseless eyes, to prevent them following him about, but to-night she seemed friendly and sympathetic as he looked up at her.

I need hardly say that the paper over which Dick sat so long that night was the weekly bill, and when I add that the first item was, "Balance from last account," it will explain the desperate look in poor Dick's eyes as he looked up at the cold, composed moon riding in the clear, indigo darkness above. That little reserve fund of Dick's had been exhausted some weeks ago, and since then he had been obliged to pay Mrs. Tysoe only so much on account, and ask her to carry forward the balance to next week's bill. It was only a little, to be sure, and Mrs. Tysoe was quite willing to do so, and even proposed to leave the whole amount to another time; but each week the balance grew a little more, and this present week one or two little extra expenses for boot-mending and

such like necessary outlay had raised the sum so alarmingly, that Dick felt that the matter must be looked in the face and grappled with boldly.

There was no escaping the truth, that they could not afford to live in their present style, and that already the serpent debt was beginning to wind its coils round him. They must leave Mrs. Tysoe's, that was very plain, and try and find humbler lodgings; but it was the little girls who would suffer most from this, for they would lose Mrs. Tysoe's kindly care, and have to shift and manage for themselves.

Had he any right to sacrifice his little sisters in this way? he asked himself. What was his duty to them? His whole soul had risen in revolt at the idea of the rough school to which Aunt Maria had proposed to send them, but, after all, would not that have been better than what he could provide for them? He had a right to his own pride, and to suffer for it if needs must; but had he a right to pride for them, and let them suffer for it? Was it not his duty to write to Uncle Tom and confess that he was not man enough to keep his little sisters, and that, after all, he must accept his charity for them? Oh! what a fool he had been not to do it at first when he could have made better terms for

them, and been at hand to watch over them, instead of coming as a suppliant to beg and entreat for the very thing he had flung back indignantly in their faces not four months ago. And what would his life at Slowmill be worth without them, when they were handed over to Aunt Maria's cold charity, and he was alone, with no little figures waiting at the corner of the street when office hours were over, no arms to cling round his neck, and coax and pet him when he was tired and dull, no tappings at his bedroom door in the morning, and entrance of little half-clad creatures wanting help in the matter of a button or a tape when Mrs. Tysoe was busy? He must not think of that, but only of them, what would be best and happiest. For that matter they could not be better and happier than they are now. He went in to have another look, and held the candle shaded with his hand, lest the light should wake them. They had never looked so well. Letty's cheeks had a sweet rose flush on them, and Sybil's young arms tossed above her head were round and dimpled. Happy too! They were as happy as the day was long; he had not seen a tear except on that one occasion, when they had left Mrs. Tysoe in the lurch, and gone off alone to Tip Cat's.

If there had only been the slightest prospect of improvment in his income he would have tried to struggle on for the present, but he was painfully conscious that Mr. Lupton regarded him with great dissatisfaction, and, not knowing the cause, he set it down to his own stupidity and shortcomings; and Mr. Burgess had a grumbling tone about everything which poor Dick thought was only called forth by himself, and felt that, far from there being any probability of a rise in his salary, he might at any time lose his situation altogether.

Once he thought he would write to Mr. Murchison, and once he even thought of poor old Jenkins and his offered loan, and then, with a desperate effort, he seized a pen and began "Dear Uncle Tom."

But just then the candle flickered in its socket and went out, and the soft-toned bell from the church struck two, echoing through the quiet town, bathed in silver moonlight; and Dick, with a strange feeling, as if the bell had sounded a reprieve, threw down the pen and closed the window and went off to bed in the dark.

I have heard of people who have found direct help and guidance in great perplexity by opening the Bible at haphazard and reading the text they open

at; and to some the help comes through the words of a passing stranger or the thoughtless chatter of a baby; and there is a poem describing how a child singing as it went along the street unconsciously affected the lives and actions of those who heard it. So it was that some words of Sybil's threw a light on Dick's uncertainty.

It was next morning when he was tying her necktie to go to church that she said, "How nice it would be if we could live in a cottage quite out in the country all the summer, Dick!"

Why not? There was all the summer before them, and if they could find a clean cottage among the fields the children would be able to live out of doors in fine weather. He had only thought, in leaving Mrs. Tysoe's of taking smaller, cheaper lodgings in the town, and these would certainly be stuffy and cramped, but a country cottage was different; and Dick turned the subject over and over in his mind, and in the afternoon set off with the little girls to a cottage about a mile from Slowmill which they had passed once or twice in their walks, and which occurred to his mind as a likely place.

You had to cross a meadow to get to it, and there was a good bit of garden round it, and a rough piece

of covert behind which would make a capital playground for the children.

Letty and Sybil knew all about the people who lived there, for they had been there several times with Mr. Tysoe; but they did not understand Dick's sudden interest in old Ricketts, who worked at the flour mill close to Mr. Burgess's, and in his rheumatic, old wife, for Dick would not tell them his intentions, in case they should come to nothing, and he should be obliged to send the children back to London and Aunt Maria.

The old man was standing leaning over the gate into the road, smoking his pipe as they came up, and he was quite willing to enter into conversation. "It's a quiet place, sure enough, and there ain't many folk pass along in the day; but me and my missis is quiet folk, so it suits well enough, and we've a lived here these thirty years, so we're about used to it. It's a good, big cottage—most too big for me and my missis now the young uns is all away; and times we've talked of moving, but the rent ain't more nor a smaller one 'ud be, and we've a nice bit of garden, so we wouldn't better ourselves. Lodgers? Well, we've took mowers nows and thens, but they're mostly a rough lot, and the missis don't like their

noise and drinking ways—as is a good-living woman though I says it."

The children had wandered off picking honeysuckle in the hedges, so Dick accepted the old man's invitation to come in and see the missis. It was the plainest, little cottage kitchen, where the old woman sat in the chimney corner, poking bits of stick into the fire with her rheumatic hands, to try and rouse a blaze under the big black kettle to make it boil for tea. There was a dresser with a poor array of plates and cups, and a patchwork curtain across the mantlepiece, on which were ranged dim photographs on glass and funeral cards in cheap frames. You might see the same in dozens of cottages, but Dick noticed that it possessed a virtue not always to be found, and that was cleanliness. The old man opened a door at the side and showed him with pride a little best parlor, with a round table in the middle, with six straight-backed wooden chairs standing round it, and a dusky little looking-glass over the chimney-piece.

It was not very spacious, to be sure, but Dick was not disposed to be critical, if he could only avoid having to write to Uncle Tom, and send the little girls away from him. But when he opened the subject with old Ricketts and his wife, he met with a de-

cided refusal, when at last they understood what he meant, for they could not imagine that a gentleman like Dick could possibly want to come and live in a cottage like that.

"It's no place for gentlefolks," they kept saying, "and the missis is that rheumatic as she couldn't wait on you as you'll be used to."

But Dick persisted, in spite of their shaking heads and discouraging answers, and made it all appear so easy and comfortable that, after a time, the old couple agreed to think it over and not decide in a hurry.

The bedrooms up stairs had uneven floors and sloping ceilings, and did not boast much furniture, but they had the all-redeeming quality of cleanliness; and Mrs. Ricketts, opening an old worm-eaten chest, showed a store of linen, sweet with lavender, of which the mistress of many a better house might have been proud; and though there were no curtains to the beds, nor carpets on the floors, Dick thought the bedrooms might compare favorably with Mrs. Tysoe's which were apt to get stuffy and oppressive.

He was so very anxious to think it suitable, that he made the very best of everything, and when the old man rather doubtfully suggested two shillings and

sixpence a week as a rent that might, perhaps, be thought too exorbitant, Dick could have declared the cottage the most elegant and luxurious accommodation to be imagined; and the little girls, coming in just then with their hands full of honeysuckle and wild roses, were quite surprised at Dick's restored cheerfulness, and at the friendly way in which he parted from the old couple, who, on their part, looked dazed and confused, and a little bit resentful, as if they were being bustled along faster than they liked or were accustomed to in the quiet jog-trot pace of their everyday life.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VISIT TO BRISTOL.

"WOULD it be convenient, sir, to spare me for a few hours this afternoon?"

"Eh? what, what?" Mr. Burgess looked sharply up at the young man. He happened to use the very same words that Fred Burgess always employed to signify to his uncle that he should not come back to the office after lunch, and this form of words had grown so familiar to the old man by constant repetition, that it quite startled him to hear them in the mouth of his new clerk, who had worked on steadily now for four months without a request for even half an hour's holiday. But now it was beginning, the old man told himself, the broom was losing its newness, and there would soon be an end to punctuality and attention to business. He had been too good-natured in allowing it with Fred, and see what it had

led to! So he would not let this youngster off so easily.

"Would it be convenient, sir, to spare me for a few hours this afternoon?"

"What for? important business, eh?"

Dick flushed up to the roots of his hair.

"I want to go to Bristol, sir."

"Oh indeed! that was what my delightful nephew always used to say, but he generally added on important business, which I usually ascertained, if I cared to inquire, was to have his hair cut. Do you want your hair cut?"

"No, sir. If it is not convenient, I can go another day."

Mr. Burgess felt a little bit ashamed of his bullying manner, as Dick quietly took up his pen again and prepared to resume his writing, and, being kind-hearted he would have been sorry if he could have seen how heart-sick the young fellow was, and how this trifling opposition seemed to fret him beyond endurance.

This visit to Bristol and its object was utterly repugnant to him, and he had nerved himself up to it only by the constant remembrance of the debt he owed the Tysoes and the absolute necessity of get-

ting free of it, cost what it might, and of starting clear in the future.

The night before he had turned out his little store of valuables and had selected any that he thought had any market value. A ring or two, some shirt-studs and a scarf-pin that had belonged to his father. There was a miniature of his fair, young mother, wonderfully like Letty, who seemed to be looking up at brother Dick from the circle of pearls with which the portrait was surrounded, just as she looked up at him morning and night when he took her face between his hands to kiss it. The pearls and gold mounting must be worth something, but it went to Dick's heart to rob the portrait of its fair setting, and it seemed almost like sacrilege, as if he were despoiling the dead. Poor, sweet, young mother that he had hardly known! His eyes were dim as he pressed the miniature softly against his cheek and whispered, "It is for your little girls, mother, your little Letty and Sybil."

Then there was his watch which his grandfather had given him the last year he was at school. What a beauty it was! He had hardly even yet entirely got over the pride of bringing it out before strangers. He had never seen one he liked half as well. He

remembered the extreme delight it gave him when he first went back to school with it, and how constantly it was necessary to refer to it, and how the first class boys came, for a joke, one after another to ask him what time it was, much to his satisfaction, till that great duffer Mabson burst out laughing, and he saw it was all done for a lark, and how he was ready to fight any one who cast a doubt on its perfect veracity, and stoutly maintained that the church clock must be slow because the time did not agree with his.

He found himself smiling over these recollections of his schoolboy days, which seemed now such ages ago; but the smile only made the pain deeper when he thought of parting with his watch.

And then the notion of going to a pawnbroker's! He had often passed the door of such a place and seen poor, drunken, desperate creatures pass in, with a furtive, shame-faced look round, to pledge their children's clothes for more gin, and had imagined the greasy counter and the frowsy, close smell and the dirty Jewish face, whose sharp eyes know in a second the value of the article offered, and whose heart must be long dead to all pity and respect for human nature.

There was no pawnbroker's that he knew of in

Slowmill, and, if there had been, he knew well enough how many curious eyes would have watched him in, and how many trumpet-tongues would have proclaimed his business on the housetops, but in Bristol he would be lost in the crowd, and could do what he pleased without any one being the wiser.

The opposition from Mr. Burgess was an unexpected difficulty, and, as he wrote from the old man's dictation, he was trying to decide whether he would go in spite of it, and risk the chance of losing his situation, or if he would go by the late train and get back to Slowmill as best he could.

But when one o'clock came and Mr. Burgess rose to go to his lunch, he said, "You had better tell Mr. Lupton that you are not coming back to-day, and I hope business will not often call you away on Monday afternoons just when we are so busy."

"Thank you, sir; indeed it shall not occur again."

"Till next time," said the old man to himself, as he closed the door and went away to his solitary luncheon, while Dick had to endure a volley of grumbling from old Lupton, from whose irritation it would seem as if this particular Monday were the busiest day of all the year at Burgess's office.

But Dick cut it as short as he could with civility, and ran off, for there was not a moment to lose if he meant to catch the train, for the omnibus was far too expensive a luxury to be thought of, and he would have to walk three miles to the station. So he only ran in and told the little girls that he should not be home till quite late, and they were to have tea, and go to bed without him, and he took a bit of bread in his pocket to eat on the way, and the little packet of valuables he had looked out the evening before, and went off, the children calling after him to bring them back some chocolates.

"You know," Sybil explained to Mrs. Tysoe, "he always used to bring us back chocolates when he went anywhere; really nice, don't you know, not like what you have in the shop, but a different sort of taste, not so much like soot. I'll give you one when he comes back, and I'm sure you'll like it."

Dick was just in time for the train, and reached Bristol without any adventure except that, at one station, a face well known to him at Oxford passed the carriage, with all the old fuss and circumstance that used to attend Dick himself in his prosperous days when he travelled. The obsequious porters carrying portmanteau, hat-box, coat, and umbrella,

the scent of a good cigar, the couple of dogs whose comfort seemed of more importance than that of all the rest of the passengers put together; it had all been second nature to Dick in old days, and he drew back now in the corner of the carriage in deadly fear of being recognized, as if it were likely that young Prosperous should be travelling third class or look for friends in that quarter.

When he reached Bristol it was not difficult to find what he was seeking for; the three dingy, smoke-grimed golden balls soon caught his eye, but he did not go into the first pawnbroker's that offered, but went straying on, passing one because it looked too smart, and another because it looked too low, and aimlessly looking into many of the shop windows, hardly noticing what his eyes were resting on, so full was he of the painful memories that the sight of Elliott of Balliol had called up in him.

So he stood for full ten minutes before a toyshop, with vacant eyes fixed on waxen-faced beauties and elaborate toys, and for all he knew it might just as well have been the little undertaker's at Slowmill, of which Letty and Sybil had grown so tired while they were waiting for Mrs. Tysoe.

It was a great pity that he was not more conscious

of the things before him, for Letty and Sybil, who had not had the chance of a good look into a toy-shop or a bazaar since they left London, would much have enjoyed a detailed account of all the toys in the window, and on another occasion Dick would have remembered this, and laid up a store of interesting information to carry to his little sisters.

More than one of the passers-by looked curiously at the young man, standing apparently lost in serious contemplation of those simpering dolls in the window, and his face seemed quite to disturb a customer within the shop, who after peering at him inquisitively between the Noah's Arks and doll's houses which filled the back of the window, opened the door and took a closer survey of him, unnoticed by Dick.

This customer was quite as remarkable as he seemed to find Dick, indeed, there seemed something more curious in a great, gaunt, old man with grey moustaches and deep lines of thought and care about his face, spending nearly an hour in minute inspection of wax dolls in a shop, than in a young man standing a few minutes outside the window.

This customer had declined to have anything to do with the smiling young women behind the counter, who generally found themselves very acceptable,

especially to gentlemen customers; and he had demanded the presence of the master of the shop, who was not nearly so used to attending to purchasers, and had frequently to appeal as to prices and varieties to the giggling young shop-women, who were much amused at the business-like and minute review and comparison of nearly every doll in the shop which this strange old man went through before he selected two dolls which satisfied his requirements.

He then proceeded to give orders for the dressing of these two dolls, still giving his instructions to the master of the shop, who, being young and unmarried, was much confused at the scarcely repressed laughter of the two girls, who were entirely ignored by the old man, and who listened with intense amusement to the blundering and unscientific language in which these two ignorant men-folk discussed the clothing of the dolls.

The arrangements were nearly concluded when Dick's face appeared at the window, and when Tip Cat, for he it was, came out into the street, the young man was just turning listlessly away. The two men met face to face, but Dick's thoughts were too far away just then from Slowmill to recognise any one from there, even indeed, if he would have known

Tip Cat again, having only seen him once, and that four months ago.

Those strange light eyes of Tip Cat were very observant and the dull, dejected look in Dick's face struck him at a glance, and without any intention of spying on him, or interfering with him in any way, he turned when he had gone a few steps and followed him, keeping him in sight through several streets, along which he noticed that Dick went in an objectless way, stopping now and then at a shop window, and then wandering on again. Was he ill? Had he been drinking? But just as this doubt entered his head, Tip Cat saw Dick quicken his step and rouse up and pull himself together, and give a look up at the smoky sky overhead, and the next minute he had turned into a shop at the corner of the street.

What shop was it? Tip Cat wondered, but as he came nearer recognised it by the three golden balls over the door. "What does this mean?" said the old man to himself, as he turned away. "Nothing good! Poor little Letty!"

CHAPTER XIV.

NOTICE TO LEAVE.

When Dick got back to Slowmill late that night, he found Mrs. Tysoe sitting up for him with her nightcap on, and rather a martyr-like aspect, and she looked very narrowly at Dick as he came in, having a general idea that coming in after twelve was usually accompanied by unsteady gait and indistinct utterance, and a tendency to set the house on fire, and it was on this ground that she had declined Joe's offer to sit up and let her go to bed, as she could not have slept a wink with the fear of being burnt alive in her bed.

But Dick only looked very tired and worn out, and he was so penitent for having kept her up, that her resolution to speak a few motherly words to the young man on the error of his ways was quite for-

gotten, and she was only anxious to get him a little supper, as he was obliged to confess, on being questioned, that he had had nothing to eat since that bit of bread he had taken from the dinner-table in the middle of the day.

To save trouble she spread the supper in the back parlour, and Dick, when he came down to it, brought down the bill and the little pile of money to pay it.

"Bless my heart! you needn't have troubled," Mrs. Tysoe said, "at this time of night too. I thought you'd alet it bide till next week, so when you didn't settle it Saturday night, I thought 'twould just be carried forward to next account."

"It won't do for me to get into debt, Mrs. Tysoe; it's as much as I can do to pay a week's bill, so I'm sure I couldn't a fortnight's."

Mrs. Tysoe laughed; she always laughed at any reference to Dick's great poverty, as if it were an amusing fiction he liked to keep up, in which it was necessary to humor him. But she did not laugh at Dick's next remark, but sat in stony silence, only the quivering of the frills of her nightcap revealing the agitation of her feelings.

"I want to thank you," Dick said, "for all your kindness to me and the little girls, and to tell you

that, much to my regret, I must give you notice to leave at the end of the week. Saturday is the right day for giving notice, I know, so we shall not leave till Saturday week; but I thought I had better tell you as soon as my plans were settled."

"Then you're going back to London, and have come back into all your property? There! if I didn't always say you would. It was only this very blessed day as I was saying to Mrs. Jones as no one couldn't look at you and think as you'd be long at Burgess's, as 'twere for all the world like putting a silk patch on a cotton gown. Dear! dear! dear! and all you've asaid about being so poor, when I warrant you knowed all along how it would all come right. And those pretty little dears, so contented and happy, and as pleased to ride with Joe in his cart as if he'd been a coach and six!"

Mrs. Tysoe was getting quite tearful and hysterical. and her words came so rapidly that Dick could not edge in a word for some minutes to enlighten her as to the very different cause of their leaving.

"But I'm not going back to London, Mrs. Tysoe, and I never shall come into any property; and I think Mr. Lupton would tell you I'm a very poor patch indeed at Mr. Burgess's, and I may think my-

self lucky if I don't get the sack. No ; the truth of it is, we can't afford to stop here, and I must try and find cheaper rooms.—No, you must not offer to lower the rent, for you do not ask a penny too much ; only you must find lodgers better off than we are and who won't give you so much trouble."

There was a strange convulsion of feeling to be read in Mrs. Tysoe's face just then, if Dick had not been too weary and down-hearted to read it. One moment she was inclined to bridle up and take offence, and talk of not giving satisfaction ; the next to dissolve into tears and beg them to stop at any terms, as she was " as fond of them two children as her own flesh and blood." One moment the darkest suspicions of Dick crossed her mind, and the next the most pitiful, motherly feeling for him and the little girls. Now she thought only of the dulness she should feel without Letty and Sybil, and now, of the brother of the dissenting minister, who wanted apartments, and who was a quiet Christian man and a traveller for the wholesale oil and colourman with whom Joe dealt, so that he was likely to be a very advantageous lodger.

" And may I ask," she said, at last, stiffly, " where you'll find cheaper rooms, where you'll get as well

done by as you've done here? though I say it as shouldn't."

"Nowhere, and I don't expect it. You've spoilt us, Mrs. Tysoe, and I don't know how Letty and Sybil will get on without you."

His voice was a little husky as he spoke, and Mrs. Tysoe's heart softened at the sound.

"Poor little dears!" she went on, "they're not of the sort to rough it. Miss Letty ain't strong, the leastest thing upsets her, and Miss Sybil have a nasty wheezing at her chest if she ketches a bit of a cold, as wants seeing to keerful if you wants to rear her. You say as your ma did'nt die in consumption, but you marks my words as some of your folks did some time or other, and it's sure and certain to come out in them little sisters of yours if they're not well looked to."

Poor Dick did not find these gloomy forebodings very reassuring, but he tried to take a cheerful view of the matter. "At any rate they are both very well now."

Mrs. Tysoe shook her head ominously, and sighed. "There's nowhere in Slowmill as I can think of as is fit for you. There's Mrs. Jolly's, but she's a deal too fond of a glass, and them's not the sort to have

the care of children ; and Mrs. Laws is that dirty, as I couldn't eat a mossel in her house were it ever so. But there ! perhaps you've found what you want, and don't need any advice from me."

" Indeed I do, Mrs. Tysoe. If you don't stand our friend, I don't know who will." And then Dick unfolded his plan of the Ricketts's cottage.

Mrs. Tysoe was, as I have said, no great walker, so, though she had lived all her life in Slowmill, and that life had extended to sixty-five years, she knew very little of the neighborhood, and Dick was rather relieved to find that she did not quite know which was the Ricketts's cottage, and that his description, quite unintentionally, conveyed to her mind an idea very superior to the humble reality.

She had seen old Ricketts ; he had dealt with them for years, which was greatly in his favor, and she had heard tell that his Missus was a decent, clean sort of a body.

" But she ain't never been used to gentlefolks' ways ; and who's to look after the children's hair, I'd like to know, and brush it and do it out as have took me sometimes half an hour between the two ? "

Dick shook his head wearily. He knew better

even than Mrs. Tysoe did, of how little hairdressing, or anything else, Mrs. Rickett's rheumatic hands were capable.

"We must make the best of it," he said, "and I must do lady's-maid now and then. We can but try it for a week or two, and see how we get on. But I must not keep you up any longer, or you will be only too glad to get rid of us."

"Well, it must be getting late," said Mrs. Tysoe; "but Joe he've taken the clock up to his room, as his watch have stopped, so I don't rightly know the time."

Dick's hand went involuntarily to his waistcoat pocket.

"Bless and save us! Where's your watch?" asked Mrs. Tysoe, as his hand fell and his face changed color.

"I left it in Bristol," stammered Dick, "to—to—be mended." Poor Dick, it was the first time he had missed the watch, and with that first impulse of a wounded creature to hide its hurt, he had told a falsehood about it—and such a poor little pitiful untruth that deceived no one, for Mrs. Tysoe stood looking at him with consternation and horror.

"Why, you've never been and—"

"Good-night," he said, irritably. "I'm tired to death, and so I expect are you;" and he left her, looking after him and murmuring, "He's been and — Who'd 'a'thought? Poor lad! poor lad! He might a'told me first, and I'll warrant as he didn't get half as he ought for it! And 'twere such a beauty! And 'twould, a'been nice for Joe. Dear! dear! 'tis a terrible pity!"

Neither Mrs. Tysoe nor Dick slept much that night, and Dick looked so dilapidated when he turned up at the office that Mr. Burgess was confirmed in his opinion, that the day before had been the first step in a course of dissipation; and, as he passed through the outer office, Mr. Macintosh pretended to take a long draught from a roll of paper on his desk, and then pointed over his shoulder to Dick's retiring figure, and winked at the office boy, who went into an irrepressible burst of merriment at this refined and elegant joke.

The morning's work had never seemed so long and tiresome to Dick before, or Mr. Burgess so fidgety and exacting; and when he came home to dinner, he found Letty and Sybil sitting up with very serious faces and red eyes, and following him about with anxious, deprecating little looks that in his pres-

ent nervous, irritable condition, made him, for the first time in his life, almost cross to them.

But the culminating point was reached, when both the children refused to take a second helping, and he caught Letty making signs to Sybil not to take a second piece of bread and giving her part of hers instead.

This was more than he could bear, and getting up suddenly, leaving his dinner unfinished, he went out, telling them to go on without him, as he wanted to walk before he went back to the office.

He could not be angry with the little girls, but he could not endure it. It was plain that Mrs. Tysoe had been talking to them. What talkers women are! What an idiot he had been not to tell her to hold her tongue! The only comfort he had had was that the children were happy and light-hearted, and well. He had meant to make the new move appear a pleasant change to them, like going out of town in the summer, and to treat it all like a picnic and a piece of fun.

He had taken the way towards Tipton Grange, and as he passed the stile leading to the farm, he did not notice that Tip Cat was standing near it, who, however, saw the young man pass and came to

much the same conclusion as Mr. Burgess and his clerks had done, from the look of his white, troubled face and heavy, anxious eyes.

He also saw a little figure that was timidly following Dick at a distance, making a run now and then to keep him in sight, and giving such a piteous, little out-of-breath sob as she passed the stile, that Tip Cat made a stride forward, as if he would have caught the little thing up or punished that brute of a brother who went walking on, leaving the little, white-faced, delicate sister to hurry after him in all the heat and dust of that Midsummer day.

Kaiser, too, was indignant at the sight, and instead of restraining himself, as his master had done after the first impulsive stride, he leapt the stile and reached Letty almost at one bound, whining and licking her tearful little face, and circling round her and, taking a corner of her pinafore in his white teeth, pulled it gently as if to remind her that the right way to Tipton Farm was over the stile.

But Letty was not to be diverted from her pursuit of Dick and she tried to push Kaiser away, but Kaiser had not been a sheep-dog for nothing, and he thought he knew his duty too well to let this little stray lamb wander any further out of the way and

he kept firm hold of her pinafore till Dick had disappeared round the corner of the road, and was quite out of sight.

And then Letty broke down altogether, and burst into such a torrent of sobs, that Kaiser, utterly bewildered, let go of her, and turned up his head and howled out of very sympathy. It was the very best thing he could have done to make up for the mistake he had made, for the sound reached Dick's ears, and the next moment he re-appeared at the turn of the road, and to his great surprise saw Letty, whom he imagined at home with Sybil, apparently struggling with a big, savage-looking dog.

It did not take half a minute for Dick to reach the scene of action and snatch Letty up in his arms and give Kaiser a most undeserved whack with his stick, which that animal might have been inclined to resent, if an imperative whistle from the other side of the hedge had not called him off at that very minute.

But Dick and Letty sat on the green bank by the roadside under the elm trees and comforted one another, for Dick wanted comfort every bit as much at his little, sobbing, trembling sister, and nothing seemed to soothe him so much as her arms clinging

round his neck and her damp cheek pressed to his.

They neither of them noticed the Grange carriage and its sleek, grey horses passing by, nor Mrs. Vivian's curious scrutiny through her gold eye-glasses.

"Who are they, Kathie, ?" she said to the girl at her side. "I don't seem to know their faces. What a pretty child ?"

"I didn't see them, Auntie, but I daresay they belong to one of the cottages in the lane."

Dick was late at the office that afternoon, he had no watch to tell him the time now, and besides it took some time to quiet Letty's convulsive sobs, and soothe her troubled little heart into composure and take her back to Mrs. Tysoe's; and Mr. Lupton gave a little sneer about punctuality when he came in, and Mr. Burgess was snappish, and out of temper but Dick did not feel nearly as bad as he had done in the morning, or as if he would like to knock his head against the dingy office wall and have done with it all.

"And, Sybil," Letty said, between the turns of the coffee-grinder, that afternoon, "I've promised Dick ever so faithful that we'll always eat as much as we possibly can, and take two helpings at dinner, for he says if we don't it will just break his heart."

CHAPTER XV.

THE FLITTING.

Dick was very glad when that last week at Mrs. Tysoe's was over. Mrs Tysoe was kindness itself, but kindness with tearful eyes and gloomy forebodings, and rather a resentful manner, as if Dick's poverty were somehow a personal affront to herself.

It was quite a relief to Dick when he heard that negotiations with the Christian commercial traveller were going on favorably, and that the Tysoes' lodgings would not be vacant for more than a couple of days after he left, but even this desirable arrangement could not be mentioned without a sigh, and nothing could induce Mrs. Tysoe to take a cheerful view of anything, though Dick and the little girls, after that first despondency, found a good deal that was pleasant in the prospect.

Dick had not only to endure a good deal from his old landlady but also from his new one, who was al-

ways starting some fresh panic and insuperable difficulty, which required sometimes hours of the most vigorous and hopeful persuasion from Dick to counteract.

"She's a pore sperritted crittur," her husband would say, waylaying Dick as he came out of the office at dinner-time to convey some alarming piece of intelligence. "She ain't slept a wink all night; and she woke me at two, and she says, says she, 'There ain't a warming-pan in the place, and most like they're all a' used to it every night of their lives,' says she."

As this difficulty was suggested under a blazing sun, with every probability of sunstroke, and Ricketts constantly applying his red-cotton handkerchief to a very moist forehead, a warming-pan did not seem a very immediate necessity.

Another time it was a more important difficulty. The four-post bed allotted to Letty and Sybil had, for some reason best known to itself, sat down like a cat during the night, and the old woman was in despair at the idea of what might have been the result if the children had been in bed at the time. But Dick and Ricketts together restored the bedstead to its original position and prevented any

chance of its repeating its eccentric behavior, and when once Dick had taken to a hammer and nails, he developed quite a talent for carpentering, and put up a rail for the children's towels and some pegs for their frocks to hang on at an easier distance from the ground than those at Mrs. Tysoe's, and a shelf or two in a recess.

The only thing he found it necessary to supply was a bath for the children, as he unearthed a big, wooden tub from an outhouse that would do nicely for him. He undertook to fill the baths himself every evening, for there was no pump, but only an open well, out of which water was drawn in a bucket by means of a long pole, and Mrs. Ricketts looked rather aghast at these preparations for much washing, which her new lodgers seemed to consider quite as necessary a part of life as eating and sleeping.

Dick spent most of his evenings over at the cottage that week, and generally Letty and Sybil went with him, assisting, with much bustling, in the arrangements. At any rate they could not starve, as Dick provided that a plentiful supply of milk should be sent every morning from the nearest farm, and home-made bread and butter from the same source, and the rest of the food Dick could bring with him

every day from the town. or Mr. Tysoe would supply on his weekly call.

The thing that most preyed on Dick's mind was the children's toilets. He had gained a little experience since they came to Slowmill, but he very much doubted his capability when there was no longer Mrs. Tysoe to appeal to in an emergency, and when one evening he made an experiment in doing Sybil's hair, such screams followed the first application of a comb to the bright curly tangle, that he gave it up in despair, and wondered if Mrs. Tysoe would let them come in two or three times a week to have their hair dressed by her, and try and make shift on the other days.

Letty thought it was very naughty of Sybil to scream and run away when Dick combed her hair, and offered her own head to be operated on, setting her lips with the determination of a martyr that no suffering should wring a sound from her, but Dick would not put her to the test, and he soon forgot all about it, and wondered why Letty sat with her arms folded on the table and her chin resting on them in deep thought, and still more when she drew a chair in front of the fireplace and mounted on it and took a long look at herself in the little mirror.

"What a vain little puss it is," he said, laughing, and thinking that sweet, little, wistful face was something to be vain of.

But Letty flushed all over to her finger-tips at his words, and jumping down, ran and hid her hot ashamed little face on his shoulder.

"I was thinking," she said—"I was wondering, Dick, if you would love us quite as well—every bit—not a tiny bit less—if Sybil and me was ugly—quite ugly—like boys you know."

Dick laughed. "Are boys always so ugly, Letty?"

"Don't laugh, Dick. I want you to say, really and truly, if we was ugly and horrid-looking little girls, would you love us ever so much as you do now?"

She was so earnest and serious that Dick did not laugh again, but took the sweet little face between his hands and looked into the great clear eyes.

"You never could be ugly or horrid to me, Letty; and I could not love you less if I tried."

This seemed to satisfy her, and she got down and ran away.

The next day, when Dick came out of the office, the little girls were not waiting for him at the corner, and he felt a little surprised, as he knew this was

not the day for Mrs. Tysoe's cart to go out, and the children had told him, with some mystery at dinner, that they were not going to Tip Cat's, as they had something else to do.

Neither were they in the shop, nor looking out at the sitting-room window; and though tea was ready when he got in, there was no sign of Letty and Sybil. He called them, but received no answer, and took up a paper to read till they made their appearance.

But presently he became aware that some one was outside the door, which stood a little ajar; it moved slightly on its hinges and the handle turned as if a hand were on it outside and he heard a whisper.

"Letty," he said, "is that you? Make haste, I must be off to the Ricketts' after tea."

But at the first word he heard a rush away from the door and down the passage to their bedroom.

He thought it was some game, and fell into what he supposed the humor of it.

"Well," he said, aloud to himself, "I suppose Letty and Sybil have gone out to tea, so I must begin."

Again the steps came stealing along the passage and again hesitated at the door, and this time Dick got up very quietly and went on tip-toe to the door, and, before the children had time to run away, threw it open.

But instead of the burst of laughter that he expected to end the joke, the children gave a cry and rushed at Dick, and getting behind him, held on to his arms and coat, so that he could not turn.

"Oh, Dick, don't look at us! You promised you would love us just the same, and we never could have done our hair ourselves! And Sybil couldn't help screaming when you combed it, and Mrs. Tysoe said it would be a good thing—Oh Dick!—don't—don't!"

For Dick had them by this time well in view, and was crying—yes, actually crying—over two little cropped heads.

The next day the children came back from Tip Cat's in the greatest state of satisfaction. Three things had happened which had pleased them, and they could hardly tell which was the nicest.

First, Tip Cat had never even noticed that their hair was cut short, and when they told him, said they looked more than ever like the Letty he had

known long ago. Then he told them that the corporal nearly always came from the town by way of the Rickett's cottage, and should call for the children just the same. The children were both surprised and pleased to find that old Ridge came that way, for it had been one of their objections to the Ricketts' that it was so far from Tip Cat's and that they should never be able to go there, and Dick too, wondered that Ridge should care to go quite two miles out of his way, or his master to send him.

But the third thing was after all the best. "For what do you think we found, Dick, in the front room on a table? Two beautiful wax dolls, quite as large as Rosabel; you remember Rosabel, don't you, Dick? and both exactly alike, with curly golden hair and blue eyes, and lovely clothes, all to take off and on, and white frocks, one with a red sash and the other with a blue, and hats and cloaks, and shoes, and socks. Tip Cat was quite as much surprised as we were, and so was the corporal, but he said he thought they must be meant for us to play with when we came to see him. Wasn't it odd, Dick, for we had been telling him only a little time ago what beautiful dolls we used to have in London, and that we had none now because we were poor, and how we

played with a stuffed rat instead, and had got quite fond of it, only it always had to be a baby in long clothes because of its tail."

Joe Tysoe was quite upset at the idea of losing his two little play-fellows, and would willingly have reduced the rent to any extent, or have gone without altogether if Dick would have agreed to stop on those terms, but when he found that Dick was not to be persuaded to remain rent free, he did all he could to make the new quarters comfortable, and helped largely in the moving, only stipulating that the little girls should come at least one day in a week for a drive with him, and now and then to have tea and help grind the coffee.

The move was accomplished on Saturday, when Mr. Tysoe came in from his rounds and could take them and their belongings in his cart, and Mrs. Tysoe gave them a grand farewell tea, and packed a basket of groceries to start them with, treating them altogether as if they were going to a desert island, where none of the necessaries of life were to be procured—an idea which rather pleased and excited the little girls, who had found a copy of the *Swiss Family Robinson* among Tip Cat's books, and were having it read to them by the corporal when, as sometimes

happened, Tip Cat was out, and they were left with the old soldier for amusement at Tipton Farm.

It was a beautiful June evening, and the haymaking was at its height, and Mr. Tysoe's cart, in the narrow lanes that led to the Ricketts' cottage, had every now and then to press close to the hedge to let great, loaded, yellow wagons lumber by, and the usually quiet meadows were lively with the voices of the copper-coloured haymakers, tossing and raking and carting, or the swish-swish of the scythes going like clock-work, laying low the rippling, brown-topped grass in sweet-smelling green swathes, or the musical click, click of the whetstones sharpening the scythes.

Old Ricketts even had been pressed into the service, as all hands were wanted to carry the hay in the great meadow near his cottage, and Letty and Sybil could hardly stop to say good-bye to Joe Tysoe, so anxious were they to run off and make their first essay at hay-making; and when Dick had unpacked and settled in as well as he could and went out to find them, they were up on the top of a load with old Ricketts, on their way to the rick-yard, promising to come back in what they call in those parts the "leer" wagon, and Dick, finding a spare rake, fell to and

worked with a will, and was quite surprised to find what a cure hard work is for the dismals.

It was altogether a promising beginning, and the farmhouse bread and butter and milk for supper was so nice that they none of them noticed the roughness of the serving up, and Letty and Sybil were asleep as soon as their heads touched the pillow, and did not even hear Dick filling their bath.

CHAPTER XVI.

TEA AT THE GRANGE.

JUST a month had passed since they left Mrs. Tysoe's, and it was the middle of July, and one Saturday afternoon Dick was sitting on that same little plank bridge where he had sat the first Sunday afternoon. There was something about that particular spot which invariably brought Kathie Dumbleton back to his mind. Not that it needed any particular place to do that, for Dick had to be very strict with himself to keep that sweet face of hers from coming between him and his writing in Mr. Burgess's room, or from appearing constantly amid the foolscap and pink tape on Mr. Luptons desk; but as he thought it his duty to chase away day-dreams in office hours, and not to give way to them too frequently when he was with Letty and Sybil, he considered that he might now and then indulge himself in them, and so

occasionally he would come to that little wood, and sit there while the children went on to see Tip Cat, or played down by the water.

That month had been successful on the whole, quite successful so far as living within their income was concerned, but even now he was not able to save out of it, for Mrs. Ricketts was no manager, nor was Dick, so between them they muddled away the money, it was difficult to say how. Besides this, he found that the walk backwards and forwards told seriously on his boots, and he was obliged to get a new pair, which made a dreadful hole in his money, and led him to wonder how working men can ever keep themselves and large families in boots out of fourteen shillings a week, or sometimes less.

He ought to be satisfied, he told himself, with the past month; of course there had been drawbacks, that was only to be expected; the days were not always bright and cheerful with haymaking, the hay was carted off and the fields left bare, and cattle turned in, and the haymakers disappeared, and the country returned to its usual quiet; there were wet days when the children could not stir beyond the porch, and found the time hang heavy on their hands as they counted the raindrops from the eaves; there

were days when Mrs. Ricketts was so bad with rheumatism that she could not do anything, not even boil a potato for the little girls' dinner, and Dick, coming in one evening, found they had only had bread and cheese in the middle of the day.

He did not come home to dinner as he had done at Mrs. Tysoe's but took something in his pocket, and made a substantial tea when he got home in the evening. He thought it was a great economy, this saving a dinner in the middle of the day, not reckoning how he was letting himself down, or noticing that he was not so much up to the mark as he used to be, was sooner tired, and less inclined for exertion. But after that day when the children had nothing but bread and cheese, Dick provided that it should never happen again, and he developed quite a talent for cooking, and broiled chops and poached eggs, and even made puddings, in a manner that quite surprised Mrs. Ricketts, whose one idea was a greasy fry, which was fatiguing after a time.

There were difficulties now and then over the children's clothes, little repairs that wanted to be done to tapes, buttons, and gathers. Mrs. Ricketts was willing enough, but her working powers at the best had been limited to what she called "gobblefying,"

and now her fingers were so twisted and cramped that it was not often she could hold a needle.

Dick's shirt-buttons, too, came off in a most distracting way; he had long ceased to be critical over the washing of shirts and collars, but buttons cannot be disregarded, and he sometimes thought the laundress must pick them off on purpose, and regard them as her lawful perquisite.

That day when he came home, for on Saturday he was home by three o'clock, he found one of his shirts laid out with great pomp on his bed, and became conscious that there was some excitement connected with it, as the little girls followed him up stairs, and stood watching to see the effect produced upon him when he saw it. It was rather crumpled, and his first idea was that the children had been trying their hands at ironing, and had been experimenting on his shirts. But on further examination he observed that a very large pearl button had been sewn on the front with apparently black cotton, and a little spot of blood underneath testified that it had been a work of difficulty, if not of danger.

"Oh! Dick, how do you think it looks?"

"Oh! Dick, it took us all the morning, and we was so afraid it wouldn't be done before you came in!"

"Oh! Dick, you'll put it on at once, won't you, to see how it feels?"

"It wasn't black cotton, Dick, only it took us such a long time to thread the needle, and the cotton will get so dirty!"

"It was Sybil's finger that bled."

Nothing would satisfy them but that Dick should put on the shirt at once, and when he came down with it on, he was obliged to unbutton his waistcoat to assure them of the fact, and they were much pleased with the effect, and were quite sorry that Dick's waistcoat buttoned up so high as to conceal the work of art.

Dick had, to tell the truth, found some difficulty in forcing the button through the buttonhole, which was not intended to allow the passage of so large a body, and it was not made more easy by the button having been sewn on not immediately beneath the hole, but he declared it was highly satisfactory, and they surveyed it with honest pride.

Dick was smiling to himself as he thought of this, as he sat on the bridge that afternoon, the children having run on to see if Tip Cat were at home, chiefly, Dick was persuaded, that they might tell him of this morning's industry, and perhaps to offer to operate

on his and the corporal's shirts but they had promised not to be long, as they were to go home to tea.

He remembered having told Kathie Dumbleton of his two little sisters, and how amused she had been at some of their doings and sayings. Ah! who was talking to her now? Who might be calling up a blush to her fair cheek, or a smile to her soft eyes? Who might be listening to the low, gentle voice? Ah what luck some fellows had! But for him—never, never again! And, as these despairing thoughts passed through his mind, a step sounded on the path, and a girl's figure came towards him through the soft, chequered lights and shadows of the wood, and Kathie Dumbleton herself stood there holding out her hand, and saying, "How do you do, Mr. Lucas? I had no idea you were in this neighborhood."

Dick stumbled to his feet in a strange bewilderment. Was it a dream, or an apparition, or a mirage like thirsty travellers see—cool water and green trees in the scorching desert? Could it be true, and that she should recognize him in his threadbare coat, greasy at the elbows and frayed at the wrists? He was keenly conscious of his old boots and crumpled wristbands, while she only noticed that the

sunny faced lad she had met last year at Oxford had grown into a handsome, striking looking man, whose face had gained in strength and thought, if it had lost something of the freshness and brightness.

After the first moment of intoxicating delight, a feeling of chill disappointment and embarrassment overwhelmed Dick, while Kathie felt puzzled and a little bit uncomfortable at his evident agitation, at his eyes that said too much, and his lips that said too little. The fact was they were re-opening this love story of theirs at different parts. With Kathie it was only in the opening numbers, and she was not quite sure if it would turn into a romance after all, or if it might not be merely a pretty sketch of Oxford Commemoration, and not even "to be continued in our next." She had liked Dick very much, and had thought of him very often since, and had even kept a certain little bunch of wild flowers, picked by the riverside, till it was little more than hay—indeed it was only a week or two ago that she had thrown it away, and then it was with a sigh and a feeling that she was growing old and wise, and casting off school-girl sentiment, and that it was a sad world after all. But still, I think Dick's image was fading a little from her memory, and that, but for that un-

expected meeting, he might have, in time, been forgotten.

But with Dick it was different. He had reached the beginning of the third volume; in those day-dreams on the plank bridge, or when his thoughts played him false at Mr. Burgess's or smoking in the porch, at the Ricketts', or in Mrs. Tysoe's little room after supper (and don't suppose that the scenes called up in his mind were any the less fair and romantic because his surroundings were common and vulgar; because there may have been bread and cheese on the table, or a short pipe in his mouth), he had rehearsed so many love scenes with Kathie Dumbleton, that it was impossible for him to forget them all, and to stand there on the bridge talking polite commonplaces like an ordinary acquaintance.

But girls are quick readers, and, by the time Letty and Sybil appeared running along the path towards them, I think that Kathie was not very far behind Dick in that pretty love story, the pages of which they were turning together, while the sunbeams stole through the thick elm boughs to peep at them, and set the quiet, brown water of the stream beneath them sparkling and dancing under Kathie's eyes, which found it did not do to meet Dick's too often.

As to what they said, the robin perched on the hand-rail of the bridge, need not have turned his head to listen so inquisitively, for it was only asking and telling how they both happened to be there, and what Kathie had been doing since they met, and what news there was from Jack in India, and how Mrs. Vivian at the Grange was her aunt, and Kathie was often staying there.

Dick did not tell her much of himself, only that he had left Oxford when his grandfather died, and had come to live at Slowmill with his two little sisters.

But Kathie had noticed one or two things by this time, though her eyes seemed riveted to the brightness where the sunbeam touched the water. She had seen that he was shabby and sad, and that his voice grew low and full of regret when he spoke of the bright old days at Oxford, and a little hard and bitter when he answered her wonders that she had not met him anywhere, and spoke of tennis parties and dances.

"And these are your little sisters?" she said, as Letty and Sybil ran up. "And what a wonderful old dog! Is that yours?"

"Oh, no," Letty answered; "it's Tip Cat's; but

he always comes to take care of us till we find Dick; and, oh Dick, Tip Cat wants to know if we would like some rabbits, and he wanted to shoot some for us, but we wouldn't let him."

"Oh, never mind the rabbits," said Dick, looking more critically than he had ever done before at the two little girls, and wishing that they had on their Sunday frocks and that Sybil would not always wear her hat on the back of her head, and that Letty's frock was not out at gathers. "This is Miss Dumbleton that I have told you about. You remember Jack, don't you? who took you to the Crystal Palace once?"

"Oh, yes; we had ices, and mine was striped. Are you Jack's sister? and is he here?"

"No, I am Jack's cousin," she answered; and Dick thought there had never been anything so graceful and lovely as the way in which she took the little girls' hands in hers and kissed their cheeks. How could Sybil presume to take away her sunshade and put it up over her own little ragamuffin head, and Letty to keep hold of the pretty hand and slip the rings up and down the slender white fingers; and yet Kathie did not seem to mind, but smiled down on them as if she liked it.

"Now, listen," she said, "for I have a plan, if you have no other engagements this evening."

Dick laughed. What engagements were they likely to have, unless it were to drink tea in the Tysoes' little back-parlor?

Kathie hesitated a minute, with a shy little look at Dick, as if she were weighing propriety, and then at the children's eager, upturned faces, as if to find an excuse in them, and then she went on—"I am all alone this evening. Aunt Vivian has gone over to Stanlake to spend the day, and may not come back till eight or nine; so won't you come and have tea with me? We will have it in the garden," she went on quickly, in answer to a negative movement of Dick's head, "and you can see the peacocks and the Persian kittens, and the flowers."

Poor Dick! he was sorely tempted, and the children's eyes turned to him with such a world of entreaty in them! but he had an under-feeling that it would be better, wiser, honester not to go. What right had a shabby, struggling lawyer's clerk to go as a guest into Mrs. Vivian's beautiful house? What right had poor Dick Lucas in the shadow to consider himself on anything like terms of equality with fair, happy Kathie Dumbleton, in the sunshine of

wealth and prosperity? It was playing with edged tools, but as far as he was concerned he had already cut his fingers hopelessly, and would carry the scars to his grave, but what if she should get a scratch? Could he trust himself to be in her company for a blissful hour and not betray his feelings, and hurt her gentle, tender heart by a cowardly display of his hopeless, desperate love?

"Thank you," he said, and he thought that his voice sounded quite insolently cool and ungrateful, "it is awfully good of you to ask us, but we must go home to tea, they will be expecting us."

"Oh, Dick!" began Sybil, but Letty was beginning to understand Dick better, and to know that he would not disappoint them without some good reason, so she gave Sybil a little nudge to be quiet, and prepared to relinquish the brilliant prospects of tea and peacocks without a murmur.

But Kathie had no idea of giving up her plan so easily.

"It is not very polite of you, I must say, Mr. Lucas, to refuse my invitation when I told you I was alone, and want some one to amuse me. But, if you will not come, I am sure Letty and Sybil will; indeed, I don't mean to let them off, so if you must go home to tea you will have to go alone."

And with that she walked off, holding a hand of each of the little girls, who went with her nothing loth, but casting deprecating glances back at Dick, hoping he would not be vexed with them.

And Dick stood by the bridge looking after them, hesitating for half a minute; many a time afterwards did he blame himself for that pitiful weakness, and told himself that, if he only had been a man, he would have shaken himself free from the fascination, and not fluttered round the flame like a silly moth.

But at the turn of the path Kathie looked back at him, and he followed her. Why not? Why should not he have one hour of happiness? It would be the last in all the long hours of dull life before him. Just for this one evening he would forget all the troubles and worries, and the office, and the weekly bills, and enjoy himself. So he quickened his footsteps, and overtook them as they came out of the wood into the park, and Kathie, looking back at him with a smile, said, "That's right, you have thought better of it!"

There was not room for all of them to walk abreast, and the children still had hold of her hands, but Dick was well content to walk behind and get a look or a word from her now and then over her

shoulder, and to tread the same path she was treading, and to take away a bramble that clung to her dress, and to feast his eyes on her slight, graceful figure, and on the sunny chestnut hair, coiled so softly low on the milk-white neck. As for her dress, though his eyes were never off her all the way through the park, he could not have described it, for Kathie Dumbleton had that rare art of dressing so that you only saw that she was sweet and lovely, and did not notice the details of material and trimming and make.

Dick had no time to notice the beauty of the park except as a background to the lithe young figure, or to see the broad shadows on the grass, and the undulating slopes, and the great spreading elm trees and giant oaks. Presently they passed through a little iron gate into the garden and along a shady shrubbery path out on to a wide lawn of velvet turf sloping up to the house, the long front of which lay before them. There was nothing architecturally beautiful about the house, but the warm tiles of the roof, and the old bricks showing here and there among the thick-growing ivy and Virginian creeper were pleasant to the eye, and the square windows with their heavy white frames had a friendly, homish look.

There were gay flower-beds in geometrical patterns in front of the house, dazzling with scarlet and purple and orange, and to the left some broad stone steps led up to a terrace skirting that side of the house, and on those steps a peacock was spreading his magnificent tail in the sun and strutting with pardonable pride, and another looked on from the balustrade behind. Below the terrace lay the rose-garden, but Kathie led the way to the right where two great black cedars stood throwing deep shade on the turf as if entering a solemn protest against the frivolity of the summer flowers. Some garden-chairs were standing in the cool shadow, which was very inviting after the stretch of hot July sun across the lawn, and here Kathie left Dick while she went into the house to hasten the appearance of tea; and she took the little girls with her, for she had seen without appearing to notice it, how Dick had been making little hasty and unsuccessful efforts to improve the children's appearance, setting Sybil's hat straight and smoothing the hair off Letty's forehead.

So Dick sat under the cedar in one of those comfortable, cushioned, garden-chairs, in which the proper depth of seat and slope of back were calculated to a nicety, with half-shut eyes of dreamy satis-

faction, watching the peacocks strutting on the terrace steps, and the trembling of the hot air above the lawn and the dazzle of the flowers in the beds, from which came heavy-laden bees every now and then, passing with a hum of reproach to the idler. Quick-footed, quiet servants were meanwhile spreading a little tea-table with dainty china and shining silver, and a gentle chocolate Dachshund came softly waddling on very bow legs and stretched a yard and a half length of dog at Dick's feet.

Kathie and the children came back by way of the rose-garden, as the beautiful roses pinned to each child's frock bore witness, but that ungrateful Dick hardly noticed the improvement worked in their appearance, how Letty's gathers had been mended and Sybil's hat bent straight, and how smooth and neatly parted each bright little head was, and how the same subtle violet fragrance hung about them as it did about Kathie. But how could Dick have eyes for any one but Kathie herself when he knew it was only for an hour, and then, never, never again. Only an hour, so the poor young fellow poisoned the pleasure of the present by anticipation of the future, only an hour, during which he might look at her and hear her voice, and perhaps now and then touch her hand in

passing a cup, or feel her dress brush against him, and then it would be time to go, and perhaps she would walk across the lawn with them and kiss the children, and then he should hold her little hand in his just for two seconds, no more, and she would look at him and say "Good-by," and then he would go away and never see her again, never, all through a long life, reaching perhaps as his grandfather's had done, to nearly eighty, working at Mr. Burgess's day after day, week after week, year after year, with the one excitement and interest of his life being how he could save a halfpenny here and a penny there on his weekly bills. He had heard of men living on faithful to the memory of their first love. Yes, but surely they had something more to remember than he had. Why, he could count the number of hours he had spent in Kathie's company, could tell off on the fingers of one hand how often he had held her hand in his. And was this enough to live on for it might be fifty years?

But meantime Kathie was pouring out tea and talking and laughing with the children, and Dick too joined in, and talked and laughed, in spite of the fifty years he was inwardly contemplating.

How delightful it was to have his cup handed to

him by Kathie, and what a pretty cup it was too, white, lined with turquoise blue. He had never realized how entirely he had lost all the elegancies of life, he had hardly indeed missed them, till he got this glimpse of them again.

Letty and Sybil of course exclaimed openly at everything, including the cakes and bread and butter, and the thick cream, and Dick, while he wished they would not be so very outspoken, felt ashamed to confess to himself that he felt much the same, and that it was not only because Kathie poured out the tea that he liked it so, but because it was in delicate china, and was strong, and had cream in it. How quickly the time rushed past, tea was done, and they went to see the conservatory and the gardens, and the children wandered away, exploring by themselves leaving Dick and Kathie loitering in the rose-garden.

What did they talk of? Nothing worth telling—sorts of roses, London flower-shows, colors and tints, and sometimes they were silent, looking both of them into the deep, crimson heart of a rose.

"Dick! Dick! where are you?" The children are calling from the terrace, the sunset is flaming in the sky and Dick wakes with a start and a cold sinking of the heart, to the fact that it is time to go.

Just as he had fancied, she walks across the lawn with them, through the shrubbery to the gate into the park, and, just as he had pictured, she kisses the little girls who cling round her with many expressions of affection and desire to meet again. And then she turns to Dick and holds out her hand and looks at him and says "Good-bye."

The children have run on thinking they see Tip Cat in the distance, and Dick holds Kathie's hand in his just as he had imagined; but he had never dreamt that he could do such a thing as seize both those soft white hands in his and hold them tight for two whole minutes, covering them with burning passionate kisses and murmuring, "Oh! Kathie, my love, my love, good-bye!"

"Why! Kathie, child, what are you doing here? They told me you were in the garden, and I have been looking for you everywhere. Did you think I was never coming back? You're a nice little person, I must say, to leave to yourself, for I hear you have had company, and a gentleman too, to tea! Who was he, dear? Simpson did not seem to know —why, Kathie darling, what is it?"

The girl's face was very pale, even in the dark of the shrubbery, for the sun had set an hour ago, and

her hands were limp and cold as Mrs. Vivian took them in hers.

"It is nothing," Kathie said, "nothing, but—" and she let the kind old friend draw her head down on to her motherly breast—"but I think my heart is broken."

CHAPTER XVII.

LETTY'S BIRTHDAY.

"DICK, don't people's birthdays always come on the same day every year?"

"Yes, Letty, I suppose they do."

"Then Mrs. Ricketts was wrong. I knew she was, for she said that my birthday came on a Monday this year, and it was on Sunday last year, so, of course, it always will come on a Sunday, won't it, Dick?"

Dick was lying flat on his back in the meadow, looking straight up into the sky, and his thoughts were so far away that it needed a strong effort to get them back sufficiently to allow of his unravelling the mystery of days of the week and days of the month, and, having done so, he prepared to let his thoughts drift away again, but Letty had a good deal more to say on the subject.

"Well, Dick, if it really is on Monday, do you

know it will be Bank-holiday as well, Mrs. Ricketts says, and you won't have to go to the office? I wanted it to be on a Sunday so that you might be at home, but if it is Bank-holiday I would rather have it on a Monday, because we can play and do something really nice. What shall we do on my birthday, Dick? Of course I know we are much too poor to have birthday presents or an iced cake, but don't you think we might do something, Dick?"

"I don't know, Letty. Shall we stop in bed all day for a change?"

"I don't think I should like that, should you, Dick?"

"Yes, as well as anything else."

"Dick?"

"Well?"

"Don't you think we might go and have tea with Kathie Dumbleton again?"

"No."

"I met her this morning."

"Did you? Where?" Dick was wide awake now, and had raised himself on his elbow.

"On the way to Tip-Cat's. She was driving, but she stopped."

"What did she say?"

"She asked where Sybil was, and who the corporal was, and where I was going."

"Anything else?"

"No, I don't think so; but she kissed me once for myself and once for Sybil.

"Did she say anything about me?" asked poor hungry Dick.

"No; but, Dick, she kissed me again after the kiss for Sybil, and it was a longer, nicer, kiss than either, and, Dick, I thought she meant it for you," said the cunning, loving little soul, longing to comfort him, and finding the way instinctively.

Letty's birthday? Dick wondered what could be done to celebrate it, as he turned over the few pence that remained after the bills were paid. It used to be so easy to get up some sort of festivity, but now, apart from the money difficulty, he did not seem to have any energy or invention. He only hoped the little girls might devise something that would be within his means and power to carry out.

But one evening when he came back from Slowmill, the children met him nearly half way to the town, having been on the look-out for him all the afternoon, going a few steps every two or three mintes, almost unconsciously, in their impatience, for

Dick did not like their roaming about the roads by themselves, so they generally waited at the gate into the field to receive him. But to-day something so very important had happened that they quite forgot to explain how they came to be half a mile from home without their hats.

Letty had got a letter. So few letters came to the Ricketts' that the old postman left the delivery of it to the very last, so it was nearly noonday before he hobbled across the meadow and read out the address to Mrs. Ricketts and the little girls, just as they were putting on the potatoes for dinner.

"*Miss Lettice Lucas,*

"*Mr. Ricketts,*

"*Near Longmead Farm,*

"*Slowmill.*"

"That's me;" said Letty; "I had a valentine once from Dick and it was directed Miss Lettice Lucas."

"But it's not Valentine's day," objected Sybil.

"No, but it's nearly my birthday and I dare say some one has made a mistake and does not know that it comes on Monday this year."

They both of them made a careful study of the di-

rection, and so did Mrs. Ricketts, putting on her large pair of horn-rimmed spectacles to see better, but she was not much "more of a scholard" than Letty and Sybil, and only managed to read a few verses out of the Bible by the sweat of her brow, and could not attempt to decipher handwriting, so they resolved to keep it till Dick came home before they opened it; and this was the cause of the appearance of two little hatless girls before Dick's astonished eyes on his way home that evening.

The letter had got quite worn at the corners and dirty by constant scrutiny, and by being kept sometimes in Letty's little pocket and sometimes inside the body of her frock for greater safety.

Dick was tired both in body and mind and was not sorry for an excuse to turn into the nearest field and sit down on the grass.

"It's not Uncle Tom's writing," he said, "nor Aunt Maria's. Who can it be?"

Letty opened it with due solemnity; when you have only had two letters in your life, you would not be likely to resign the dignity of opening one to other hands. Inside there was not a proper letter, beginning "My dear Letty," and ending "Yours affectionately," not even a birthday card, but only rather a crumpled

bit of tissue paper, with some printing on it, folded in a half-sheet of note-paper with a few lines of writing on it. Letty's face fell with disappointment, but Dick caught it from her hand with an exclamation of surprise. "It is a 5*l.* note," he said.

"For Letty's birthday, to be spent as she likes," was written on the paper.

It was a minute or two before Letty could realise that the dirty piece of paper was of the same value as five golden sovereigns, and, meanwhile, Dick was examining the writing and the postmark to find out who the sender could be. There was only the Slowmill postmark, so the little girls' strong persuasion that it came from Aunt Maria could have no foundation, even if the writing had the least resembled that lady's angular style. So too it could not be Mr. Murchison ; and Mr. Tysoe, with all the good-will in the world, could not have afforded such a handsome present, and would not have given it secretly if he could. Mr. Burgess ? but what did he know or care about Letty's birthday ? Dick hardly thought he was aware of the children's existence.

Who then could it be but Kathie ? No doubt the children had chattered to her of this birthday, and of their being too poor to celebrate it as they used, and

she had hit upon this plan of giving the children a treat without hurting any one's pride. To be sure the writing was more like a man's, but Dick did not know what Kathie's writing might be like, and besides it might be feigned or directed by some one else. So Dick made up his mind that it was Kathie's gift, and loved her, if that were possible, all the better for it, and would have liked to have the envelope to treasure among his few precious keepsakes, if Letty would have parted with it; and he let the children guess one person after another as the probable giver—Jenkins, Mr. Tysoe, Tip Cat, Mr. Murchison, Ellen or Grace—without attempting to set them right.

But how was it to be spent? Next day to Letty's extreme delight he changed it in Slowmill for five of the brightest sovereigns he could get. It should all be spent on Letty's birthday, and Letty's pleasure, and not a halfpenny should get mixed in with the housekeeping money on any consideration, though a little addition to that very scanty allowance would have made the wheels run smoothly for weeks to come.

But Letty and Sybil soon made up their minds what they should like to do, and their plan found

great favour in Dick's eyes, for since that evening at the Grange he had never gone anywhere except straight to the office and back, not even to church on Sunday, and the idea of getting clear away from Slowmill for a couple of days seemed to Dick like the opening of a cage door to a bird. The idea was to go to the seaside to spend Sunday and Monday. Letty did not mind where, as long as there were shells to pick up, and donkeys to ride, and rocks where they could paddle about and find crabs; and after much consultation Sandyshore was decided on as fulfilling most of these requirements, and also not being a very long journey and not being a likely place to meet any of their former London or Oxford friends.

No doubt it would be overwhelmed with excursionists, but this would be the same everywhere, and after all, they were excursionists themselves, so what right had they to object to others? They would do it all comfortably, and to begin with, they had a fly to the station. and the children much regretted that the way to the station did not lie through the town, so that the Tysoes might see their unusual grandeur.

It gave Letty such exquisite satisfaction to think

that it was all being paid for out of her money and that she was giving Dick and Sybil a treat as well as herself ; and at starting it was arranged that she should keep the money, having laid out the first shilling on a smart little blue purse, but it proved such an anxious charge, being lost twice on the way to the station, that they agreed that Dick had better undertake it.

It was a beautiful day, and the children were so happy and so gay that Dick could not brood over his troubles as he had done of late, but found himself laughing almost like old times, and wondered how he could be so cheerful when he had said good-bye to Kathie for ever.

They got down to Sandyshore by six, and had dinner at a little round table in a large bow window at the principal hotel, looking out on a dancing bright green sea, studded with boats and yachts and fishing smacks, and more distant steamers, while in the foreground was the esplanade, with a band playing, and carriages driving past, and parties of ladies on horseback cantering by, and just across the road was a stand of patient, subdued donkeys with scarlet-bound saddle-cloths, and wicked-looking goats chewing the cud, and surveying the crowd with evil, glassy, yellow eyes.

Sybil and Letty were so excited by the gay prospect, so different from that at Ricketts', or even the Tysoes', that they could scarcely eat their dinner, though Letty herself had chosen it, trying to combine everything she had ever heard Dick say that he liked.

And after dinner they went out and walked along the esplanade till they had got away from most of the crowd, and could only hear snatches of the music now and then. The sun had set, and the gold and crimson was dying into orange and brown, and a little dainty crescent moon was asserting her right to govern the night, though she was not strong enough to draw a thread of light across the purple sea. The tide was going down, and the cool air was laden with the refreshing smell of the seaweed on the uncovered rocks. It was too dark to explore those slippery promontories and tempting pools, so the children contented themselves with popping the brown pods of the seaweed on the break-water, where Dick sat smoking a really good cigar, of which Letty had insisted on laying in a store before they left the neighborhood of the shops, as well as chocolates and sugared almonds for herself and Sybil.

It was very soothing and very refreshing, and the

soft wash and splash of the little waves on the rocks whispered hope to a heart that was too young to despair, and Dick found himself thinking, "Ah, perhaps, some day—" instead of "Never again! never again!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

SUNDAY passed entirely to the children's satisfaction, but much too fast, and Monday dawned as bright a day as the most exacting Bank-holiday-maker could possibly desire, the sky one stretch of vivid blue, the sea of sparkling silver.

Dick went out for a bathe before breakfast, and came back looking as if the sea had washed the price of meat and quartern loaves out of his head, to find the little girls peeping out of the coffee-room window impatient for his return, having made great friends with one of the waiters, and ordered breakfast at the same table at which they had dined on Saturday evening. They were obliged to make haste over breakfast, as they had sent across to engage donkeys immediately afterwards, as the waiter had told them that, when once the excursion

trains began to arrive, they would not have a chance of a donkey, and they were very particular in their selection, both of donkeys and boys.

They went for an hour's ride along the sands, and might have gone much further in the time if they would have allowed the stick to have been more freely applied. Then they devoted themselves to digging and castle-building and shell-finding and paddling about the rocks, and finished a most delightful morning by a row in a boat with Dick out beyond the end of the pier. Then came dinner, and, after that, as their train did not start till four, there would still be two delightful hours to go and see how their castle had withstood the encroachments of the tide.

"Oh, Dick!" Letty said, as she capered along at his side, "I don't think ever any one had such a delightful birthday!"

Their fortifications had been constructed on the beach near where they had been sitting on Saturday evening, beyond the extremest limit of the esplanade, which at Sandyshore stretches out to more than a mile of terraces and rows of green-shuttered houses. Osnaburgh Terrace is the last row of houses on the esplanade, but beyond this some adventurous builder

had run up two or three detached villas of pale yellow, half-baked-looking brick, only divided from the beach by a little bit of sandy garden and unpainted iron railings. Two of these desirable residences were to let, as declared by a large board in the garden and bills in each of the windows ; but the third and furthest from the town seemed to be inhabited, for Dick had noticed in the morning a brougham standing a long time at the door on the road, which approached the house from the back. Now a light invalid carriage was in the garden, and soon after Dick had taken up his seat on the breakwater, and while Letty and Sybil were hard at work building up the walls of their fortress, which had already begun to yield to the assaults of the creamy, incoming waves, a child was carried out of the house and laid in the carriage — a child wrapped and swaddled up as if a breath of the sweet, strong sea-air might be too much for her, and laid so tenderly on soft cushions, and the carriage moved so carefully, as if a sudden jerk or jar might shatter the fragile little frame.

It was evidently a trained nurse who carried the poor little invalid so skilfully, and that could be none other than the mother who fussed and fidgeted be-

hind, scolding the clumsy but well-meaning nurse-girl who was to draw the chair, in tones that somehow sounded familiar to Dick as he listened.

His attention was called away just then to the children, who wanted his help to finish the bridge between their castle and the breakwater, and when he returned to his seat the little carriage had been brought over the rough sand heaps at the top of the beach, and now, having gained the level, was being pulled slowly along the sand only a few yards away from him, with the anxious mother guiding and steadying the carriage from behind. No wonder that her tones had been familiar in Dick's ear, especially in the act of scolding, for it was Aunt Maria.

Dick gave a start and suppressed exclamation of recognition, which was echoed by Aunt Maria ; but, it was the child who spoke first, crying in a thin, weak little voice, half-stifled in pillows and wraps, " Dick ! Dick ! it is cousin Dick, mamma."

He never would have recognised Ellen in that wan, drawn little face, with great eager eyes and close-cropped hair and sunken temples, and lips drawn tightly across the teeth. But Ellen it was, and Dick's heart gave a great bound of pity as he glanced from

her to Letty and Sybil — such sunburnt, happy, healthy little creatures, standing barefooted and laughing, clinging together on their castle, while the water creamed up round their little pink feet.

Aunt Maria made a step back from Dick's outstretched hand, and gave a movement as if to wave him away; but Dick, who set it down to her recollection of their last parting, was not to be repulsed, and took her hand and bent to kiss her cheek, which surely had grown wonderfully old and furrowed since last they met. As for him, any feeling of resentment that might have lurked anywhere in his inmost heart (and I hardly believe any remained), vanished at the sight of Ellen's death-stricken face, and the miserable agony of anxiety in her mother's.

But Aunt Maria was strangely ungracious still. "Don't!" she said, almost flinging Dick's hand from her. "You'd better go and take the children away. Oh! merciful heaven! how well and strong they look! For pity's sake take them away."

What could she mean? Dick drew back a minute, puzzled and wounded; but Ellen's little feeble voice recalled him.

"Dick," she said, "don't go away. Dick was always kind to me."

"Yes, my darling, yes. Dick shall stay. Oh, what shall I do?" cried the poor woman. "She has hardly taken any notice of any one before, and she looks so much brighter now. The doctor said it would do her good to be out in the air, but I think it was seeing you did it. Yes, she has been very ill, and so is Grace; but Ellen is getting better, much better," she said, looking into Dick's face with that hungry longing for assent, that insistence of poor souls who do not believe what they say themselves, and yet would try to force it on others. "But Grace is very bad; we are very anxious about her, and—oh!" she exclaimed, turning to the house, where a signal was being given from the bedroom window, "she wants me; I must go. She must be worse. Oh, Dick, stay with Ellen. I won't be long; I will be back in a minute. Don't let the children go near her."

"They shall not disturb her," Dick said, rather resenting the insinuation that little gentle Letty or Sybil could be rough or noisy with the sick child, and Aunt Maria hastened away to the house.

Letty and Sybil had become aware by this time that Dick was talking to some one, and now came up to the chair, standing with their tucked-up frocks

and bare feet, and with spades in their hands, looking with large, round eyes of wonder at the child whom they could hardly believe to be the cousin Ellen with whom they used to play and quarrel, and who had slapped them, and been slapped in return. But Ellen took hardly any notice of them, or of the bright-colored pebbles and shells and seaweed which they had collected, and the best of which they laid on the edge of the carriage as an offering to her; but it was Dick's name she kept murmuring, and Dick that her great eyes followed; and when for a moment he was out of sight she broke into a little, fretful, wailing cry; and when he laid his hand near hers, her weak nerveless fingers closed round his, and would not let him go.

The nursemaid seemed a stupid, dull sort of girl, and in answer to Dick's questions only grinned and scraped a heap of sand with her clumsy feet.

They must have been there a quarter of an hour, and Dick was still holding the child's hand and saying at intervals, "Poor little Ellen—poor child!" when a gentleman, passing along the top of the beach, stopped and looked at them. He looked like a doctor, and seemed to be in a hurry, but he turned and came down the beach towards them.

"I suppose you know," he said to Dick, "that this little girl has had scarlet fever, and that her sister is lying ill of it now in that house? You should not let those children be with her. It is so terribly infectious."

And then he hurried away, leaving Dick hardly taking in the full meaning of what he had said for the first minute. He had fortunately never been much in the way of illness, especially infectious illness; but, of course, he knew that scarlet fever was infectious, and that it meant danger for Letty and Sybil; and, drawing away his hand from Ellen's, his first impulse was to catch his two little sisters up in his arms and hurry away as quickly as possible, but Ellen's weak, wailing cry began directly he turned away, and he could not find it in his heart to leave her.

What could he do? He called the children to some distance from the carriage, and bid them put on their shoes and stockings as quick as they could.

"It's not time to go yet," pleaded Letty; "and we did so want to see the waves knock down our bridge."

"I want you to do something for brother Dick's sake," he said, and his voice was so grave that Letty

said no more, but began that difficult task of pulling stockings on wet feet as quickly as she could.

"I want you and Sybil to go steadily along the esplanade, past the hotel and the pier, and straight to the railway station. You know where it is, don't you? And go into the waiting-room and stay there till I come. My darlings, I am so sorry, but it can't be helped."

"May we say good-by to Ellen?"

"No, no!" he said, with a shudder. "I will say it for you. I want you to go directly."

He stood watching the two little backs as they plodded rather drearily away hand-in-hand along the beach. He was almost afraid that Sybil was crying, and he had seen Letty's lip tremble as they turned to go; but the cry of "Dick, where are you gone?" from the carriage called him back and he took up his place again by Ellen's side. Every moment that he sat there he realised more fully the danger that the children had run, and felt more indignant at Aunt Maria for exposing them to such a risk; blaming himself all the time for not being quicker to guess that it was fever that had made such a wreck of his little cousin.

It seemed to him a long time that he sat there,

but it was really only a few minutes, when Aunt Maria appeared again from the house, and Dick rose to meet her with a world of reproach in his face.

But she had no eyes but for the child. "We must bring her in at once," she said. "She has been out too long."

Dick drew back. How could she be so selfish, even in her great trouble? But, as they began to move the carriage, the clumsiness of the servant and the over-anxiety of the mother made it shake and rock, and a moan of suffering from the child called him back.

"Let me do it," he said; "I will steady it." And he took the carriage carefully up the beach, and when they reached the house he lifted the poor, little light figure from the carriage and carried her into the house in his strong arms.

The child seemed only half conscious by this time, but she murmured his name, as he put her into the nurse's arms, as if she would have thanked him.

He got no other thanks. Aunt Maria was hurrying by him as he went out into the passage, without even saying good-by; but he stopped her.

"You should have told me" he said. "You should have warned me of the infection."

"I didn't know you would be afraid," she answered.

"It was not for myself," he went on: "but I have nothing in the world left me but Sybil and Letty, and if any harm happened to them I could never forgive you."

"Don't be hard on me, Dick," she said, in a strange, hard, shrill voice. "Don't be hard. Grace is dying—my last baby, you know, Dick, my pretty little Grace."

And then she was gone, and Dick passed out into the August sunshine from the dark passage, which seemed the very shadow of death.

He had half an hour before the train, and that must be devoted to disinfecting as well as he knew how. How he wished he had paid more attention to the subject—attended ambulance lectures, or listened when scientific friends held forth; but he had only his own reason to guide him, and that led him to walk quickly along the beach where the sea-breeze blew freshest, and, when he was some way from the esplanade, take off his coat and wash face and hands in the sea-water. This was all he could think of or had time to do, for he had yet to pay the hotel bill, and fetch their bags and get to the station, to relieve

the anxiety of the two little sisters, who were watching for him from the waiting-room door, getting more and more large-eyed and terrified as the people began to collect and crowd the station.

They flew to meet Dick as soon as they caught a glimpse of him, but he would not let them touch him even now, but put them into a carriage with some ladies, and he himself got into a smoking carriage, and stoically endured fumes of bad tobacco and conversation to match, till they reached the station for Slowmill; and then again he put them into a fly and mounted himself on the box, and only allowed himself to feel fit to touch them when they reached the Ricketts', and he lifted Sybil out fast asleep and carried her in, even then feeling a qualm as he thought of the last child he had carried, and how Ellen's head had rested on his arm just where Sybil's lay.

"What a fidgety old hen I am getting," he told himself, "with my two little chicks."

CHAPTER XIX.

"TIP CAT, REMEMBER YOUR PROMISE."

It had been a wet day, but the weather was clearing towards the evening, and the heavy grey clouds were rolling away into the west, burying the sunset in their great, soft masses, but leaving a clear, pearly reach of sky in the east, with just a tinge of pink from the invisible sunset.

There had been a good deal of rain that week since Bank-holiday, which had interfered considerably with harvest operations in various parts of the country; but as most of the land round Slowmill was pasture, the farmers did not much care, though, of course, they grumbled quite as much as if all their hopes were centred on the wheat.

Tip Cat had come out to stretch himself that evening, and was leaning on the low wall in front of the house, with Kaiser as usual by his side. That week's

rain had put an end to the summer, which had held her own bravely till then, but now autumn reigned in her stead, and had laid his Midas hand already on the chestnuts here and there, turning them to gold.

Tip Cat's thoughts as he stood there were carried back more than five-and-twenty years, to a garden with a great horse-chestnut tree, standing on a lawn which it littered with its bright yellow leaves, while it filled with mock sunshine the bow windows of a pretty country house.

It was the vicarage house where he had been a pupil before he went to Oxford, and under the chestnut, before his mind's eye, stood Letty Vane, the vicar's only daughter, holding a great yellow fan-leaf in her hand as she talked to him. They were great friends, though he was only a great clumsy hobbledehoy, and she all that was beautiful and graceful and fair.

She had come out into the garden to find him, to ask him to do her some trifling service—to post a letter or cut a pencil—so small that he had forgotten what it was.

"I always come to you when I want anything done," she said, "dear old Tip Cat; I don't know what I shall do without you."

And then he had stammered out something about being always ready to do anything she wanted.

"Shall you?" she asked with a smile and a little sigh, as if with a presentiment of coming trouble. "But what if you are at the other end of the world?"

"I would come," he answered, "if you wanted me, even from another world."

"Silly boy," she said, and stroked his cheek with the chestnut leaf, till he caught her hand in his.

"Will you promise," he asked, "that you will always come to me if you want anything done, or are in any difficulty or trouble?"

"Of course I will," she answered. "I shall come, perhaps when you least expect it, and say, 'Tip Cat, remember your promise."

It was more than half a joke, and it ended in a laugh and a race across the garden to the filbert walk, and a merry cracking of nuts and talking nonsense, but under it all there was a seriousness and a meaning which they both of them felt and remembered.

Years had passed since then, and Letty had married, and gone to India and died, and had never reminded him of his promise. She had not been false to him, though she had spoilt his life, for she

had never thought of him but as a boy and a brother while he had loved her with the strong lasting love of a man. In the long years of gnawing regret and weary longing that had followed, he had sometimes thought that if he could have done something, suffered something, comforted or helped her in any way he could have endured the loss better, but all possibility of this was at an end, for she was in her grave, and needed no help or comfort from him. How vividly that scene in the vicarage garden came back to him that evening! That soft sighing of the trees might be her voice, that leaf, that came fluttering down, might have dropped from her hand, if he closed his eyes he could fancy she was at his side, saying, "Tip Cat, remember your promise."

But as he stood with closed eyes picturing that scene, some one was, indeed, standing close by him, some one, whose footsteps he had not heard, though they were not as light and buoyant as they used to be, some one looking up at him with great sad eyes, some one, as strange chance would have it, with a big chestnut fan-leaf in her hand.

Could it be Letty Vane come from another world to claim his promise? Tip Cat wondered for a moment, as he opened his eyes and looked down into

a face so strangely like his dead love's, and heard a voice with the same soft tone say, "Tip Cat, we're in such trouble." And then he knew that she had sent her little girl to claim his promise.

"We're in such trouble, Tip Cat! Sybil is ill, and Dick can't go to the office, so he won't have no money on Saturday, and he wants to send me away to Uncle Tom, and I can't go away and leave him, and Sybil ill——"

"What's the matter with her?"

"Dick says it's scarlet fever, and he's sent for the doctor but he hasn't come, and her head's awful bad, and so is her throat, and sometimes she don't know me and thinks I'm somebody else. Tip Cat," Letty whispered, clinging to his arm which was round her, "do you think Sybil is going to die? You won't let her, will you? I can't do without her, and she's so little, you know, too little to die."

Tip Cat held the trembling little thing close in his great, strong arms, as if he would protect her by main force from trouble or from death itself.

"Who is with her?"

"Only Dick. Mrs. Ricketts is bad with the rheumatics, and she can't do nothing hardly, and she cries and shakes her head when I speak to her, and

Ricketts is afraid that the people at the mill will find out that she's ill, and not let him go to his work, and he wanted Dick not to send for the doctor, as he says they make such a fuss nowadays about things being catching, and Dick thinks that perhaps he did not give his message, as Dr. Lee hasn't come all day."

"We'll go and fetch him," said Tip Cat. While Letty had been talking his mind had been busy forming a plan of action, and, once formed, he was not slow to carry it out. Five minutes were enough to harness the quick-trotting bay mare into the dog-cart, principally with his own hands, while he gave some clear, sharp, precise directions to the corporal, which made that old soldier open his eyes in amazement, though he was far too well disciplined to say a word or do anything but obey.

Letty, not being so well drilled, altogether refused to stay with the corporal, as Tip Cat at first proposed, and broke into such an agony of tears and sobs that Tip Cat lifted her himself into the dog-cart and wrapped her up in a plaid, for night was coming on and the air was damp and chill, and drove off without another word, rattling along the road and over the stony streets of Slowmill at a pace

that made the people run to their doors and windows to see who it could be in such a desperate hurry.

Dr. Lee had just sat down to supper after a long round among some of his more out-lying patients. He had got very wet, and, having put on his slippers, was not much inclined to sally forth again, even though old Ricketts had been better than Dick suspected, and had delivered the message, but in such a modified and guarded manner that Dr. Lee concluded that it would be quite time enough to go and see the patient next morning. But when Tip Cat arrived, and with a certain accent of command in his voice, and a still more decided look of the same in his strange light eyes, desired him to go without a moment's delay, Dr. Lee called for his boots forthwith, and left his supper unfinished, and climbed as briskly into the dog-cart by Tip Cat's side as if he had had no thought of any other way of passing the evening.

He had met Tip Cat once or twice in the hunting-field, and had heard a lot of gossip about him from one and another, but this was the first time he had ever spoken to him, and he felt he was too good a patient to allow to fall into any other doctor's

clutches, and that it was quite worth while to oblige him, even at the sacrifice of his supper and night's rest.

"Hullo! who's this?" he asked, as what looked like a bundle of wraps at Tip Cat's side moved and a face looked out at him.

"It is the other little girl," said Tip Cat, "and I wanted to ask you what we had better do about sending her away."

"Not much good now," was the reply. "Should have been done a week ago from what you tell me. It's too dark to have a look at her. Give me your hand, little woman, if you have such a thing about you under all these wraps. There, there! never mind, we won't take you away from brother Dick and little sister, never fear!"

And then Letty, quite contented, nestled her face against Tip Cat's sleeve and dozed, only indistinctly hearing the men's voices going on above her head, and not heeding what they said.

Can you fancy, reader, what the past week had been to Dick? How, the morning after their return, when the children had seemed as bright and well as ever, he had laughed at his own fidgets and fears of the night before; how, a day or two later, he had

been quite cross with himself for fancying that Sybil was pale, and told himself that if she were not quite as rosy as usual it was the effect of the wet weather, which had prevented them from going out. No doubt it was from the same cause that she was a little bit cross the next morning, and peevish, and cried when Letty accidentally pushed against her; but when he came home in the evening, and only Letty ran down the wet garden path to meet him, his heart sank as he heard that Sybil had been very sick, and was asleep on the bed. "It's biliousness," Mrs. Ricketts said, "and she'll be all the better to-morrow." But in the night when Dick went in once or twice to see how she was, the child was tossing and turning and talking in her sleep, and was hot and flushed and restless. She seemed better in the morning, but Dick went to the office with a very heavy heart, and annoyed Mr. Burgess by his inattention and carelessness.

He found Sybil, when he got home, sitting on the three-legged stool in front of the fire, resting such a heavy little head on Mrs. Ricketts's knee! and found she had eaten nothing all day, but was thirsty and parched. Dick sat all the evening holding her in his arms, and put her into his bed for the night, and

spent most of that leaning over her and listening to her difficult breathing and wandering talk. Happily next day was Sunday and he was not obliged to leave her, but oh! how long that day seemed; and still longer the night that followed, for the child was light-headed, and talked such strange baby-nonsense as made Dick's heart ache again. Would the morning never come, and old Ricketts stop snoring in the room below, and begin to stir to go off to his work? —for Dick had by this time no doubt what was the matter, and knew that there was no time to be lost in having a doctor, and that he ought not to go to Mr. Burgess's, even if he could bear to leave Sybil, and that as for what they were to live on or how the doctor was to be paid, it must be left to the future to prove—it was no use thinking of that now.

And then came Ricketts's unwillingness to make the illness known, and his wish to keep it dark, lest the inspector should be down on them, messing about with sulphur and lime and all the rest of it; and not letting a chap go to his work for six weeks or more, as he did with poor Wilson as pretty nigh starved, along of him and his whimsies. He tried to persuade Dick the child was better, as she was quiet for a bit, lying with her eyes half shut, breathing heavily; but

Dick knew better, and at last old Ricketts went off grumbling, with a note from Dick to be left at the office, and a message to Dr. Lee, which Ricketts did not deliver till after the doctor had started for his rounds, and which, when it reached him, would not, as we have seen, have disturbed the doctor from his supper, if it had not been for Tip Cat.

Then Dick began to fret and worry over Letty, and the danger to her of slipping in and out of the room, and sitting at the foot of the bed watching Sybil's every movement, ready to put back the clothes the fevered child kept throwing off, or to give her some milk when the dry lips moaned for something to drink. If there was only some one to take her up to Uncle Tom! He could not refuse to find shelter and care somewhere for her; and once Dick counted out what money he had left, and told Letty to put on her hat and take it to Mrs. Tysoe, and ask her to take her up to London to Uncle Tom's bank; but Letty, who was usually so obedient and submissive to Dick's slightest wish, rebelled now, and cried and sobbed so bitterly that Dick was obliged to give it up, only keeping her as much out of the bedroom as he could.

As the day wore on, and no doctor came, he began

to distrust Ricketts more and more, and when, towards evening, Letty disappeared, he fancied she might have gone to fetch him, and was divided between anxiety for the child alone in the roads in the dusk, and a burning desire that the doctor should come by any means before night.

Reader, do you know the look of a bedroom in which a man has been acting as nurse? I mean, of course, ninety-nine men out of a hundred, for here and there you may find a first-rate man-nurse, who can bear comparison with the best of the woman-nurses. They may be loving and anxious, tender and strong, patient and gentle, but they are sure to get the room into a hopeless muddle, as Dick had, when Dr. Lee stood at the door with Tip Cat looking over his shoulder.

The bedclothes were tumbled and tossed in utter discomfort, the bedstead, which had never stood quite even on its four legs, was propped at one corner by a chair, and another stood near heaped with cups and plates, and the candle-stick with a tallow-candle guttering from the draught from the door and window. A heap of Sybil's clothes lay on the ground near the window, and Dick sat on the bed in his shirt-sleeves, with a pillow on his knees, on which

the child's head was resting for a minute or two in its restless, feverish tossing and turning.

There was no doubt that the child was very ill, but it was Dick's face that struck Tip Cat most, it looked so worn and haggard and old and full of care, and Tip Cat turned away as the doctor entered the room and went down into the room below with a bitter feeling of self-reproach, that he had not heard his old love's voice sooner, reminding him of his promise, through this poor young son of hers, and his two little sisters, who had sunk to greater depths of poverty and want than ever he had dreamt of from the merry prattle of the children, who had talked of poverty as a bit of fun, and of their present life as superior in every way to their old one.

CHAPTER XX.

TO THE RESCUE.

"MOVE her?" Dick said, in answer to Dr. Lee's words, which he seemed only dimly to understand. "Move her this morning? Is it to the hospital."

It was morning, and Dr. Lee was there for the third time. He had gone away after his first visit, and returned in an hour, bringing medicine and a few sick-room comforts for the child, and managing with a little artful arrangement, to introduce some order into the chaotic room. Then he had gone away again, and Sybil must have slept; certainly Dick had, for suddenly Dr. Lee was standing there again, and saying that at twelve a carriage was coming to move them all away.

"Tip Cat? What had he to do with it?" Dick wondered. He fancied he had caught a glimpse of some one behind Dr. Lee when he first came, but afterwards he thought it must have been only a fancy, for,

with watching and anxiety, he got all sorts of queer notions into his head, and saw sometimes one person, and sometimes another, standing in the little room—now Uncle Tom, broad and burly, twisting his eye-glass in his hand; now Kathie, fair and gentle, towards whom he started with a cry of warning against the danger of being there.

Dr. Lee looked narrowly at the dazed, puzzled look on Dick's face. "I shall have another patient," he thought, "before long, and it's a question if he will be number two or three. It's not a hospital, exactly," he said, "but Mr Cathcart—Tip Cat, they call him—has offered his house, and went off to Bristol last night to make all arrangements and to get a nurse; and he'll send a regular ambulance by twelve to move the child."

"But I can't let him do it," Dick interrupted. "We have no claim on him—I hardly know him—"

"Do you want the child to die?"

Dick's head sunk.

"I tell you what it is," the doctor said, "he's the most extraordinary man I ever came across, and this is the biggest piece of generosity I ever heard of, and you'll be the greatest fool in the world if you make a fuss about it. It was the luckiest day of

your life when you came to Slowmill, and came across Tip Cat."

And Dick, as he turned back to Sybil, wondered to himself how what had seemed such trouble and misfortune, could look to any one like good luck, but he offered no further opposition; and when the carriage came to the door, he obeyed the doctor's directions, and wrapped the child up in blankets, and carried her down and laid her on the cushions in the carriage, and got in after her with Letty, while Dr. Lee mounted on the box with the driver.

Tip Cat did not appear on the scene at all, nor was he visible when they arrived at Tipton Farm, though as Kaiser's shaggy head was to be seen watching the arrival from one of the windows, it may be concluded that his master was not far off.

A pleasant-faced, cheerful nurse met them at the door, looking delightfully fresh and unfeverish in her print dress and white apron and cap, and took the bundle of blankets very tenderly in her arms and carried it up stairs to the large, airy bedroom in front, which used to be empty and unfurnished, and had often served as a play-room for the children on a wet day, but was now turned into a sick-room that would have satisfied the most exacting of doctors.

Tip Cat would dearly have liked to have filled the room with pretty furniture for the reception of his welcome little guests; but his own common sense and the doctor had told him that the less furniture there was the better; so there were no curtains nor carpet, and, besides the two little beds, only just what was immediately necessary for use, and nothing for ornament.

Tip Cat consoled himself by furnishing Dick's room adjoining, with every comfort modern luxury has invented, though, as subsequent events proved, he had better have kept to the same severe style in both rooms, as very soon those curtains, arm-chair, and sofa had to be dispensed with.

Tip Cat's greatest difficulty had been about the nurse, for he would have one quite to his mind; and at such short notice, and at such an early hour in the morning, there was not so much choice as in the matter of chairs and bedsteads. When at last he found one to please him, it was very uncertain if the situation would please her; and when she reached Tipton Farm and found that she was the only woman about the place, she had half a mind to leave at once. But Ridge was so wonderfully handy and attentive, and Tip Cat ready, at the least suggestion of any-

thing wanting, to be off at any hour of the day or night to scour the country to procure it, sparing neither money nor trouble, so that Nurse Esther soon got used to the unusual state of affairs, and, after a time, liked it so well, that she was inclined to think that households composed of women were a mistake.

She had a nice, pleasant, kind face, and strong, young arms, and a gentle, decided way of doing things, as if she knew what she was about and meant to do it; and Letty's eyes watched her longingly as she carried Sybil up stairs, and she followed with Dick and saw the airy, orderly room—so different from Mrs. Ricketts'—and the little white bed, with the cool, fresh pillows and bed clothes, ready to receive the poor, little, feverish body, that had made such a hot, tumbled hay-cock of the bed, where Dick's loving but inexperienced hands could not restore order or comfort.

But when the door closed and left Dick and Letty outside on the landing, Letty's full little heart overflowed into bitter sobs and tears. "Oh, Dick, mayn't I be ill, too? Oh, Dick, I'd like to be ill! I'd like to be ill, too, with Syby!"

Dick, too, was feeling very forlorn, as if his work had been suddenly whisked away out of his hands

and he did not know what to be at; but he gathered Letty up into his arms and sat down on the stairs and tried to comfort her, telling her she should stop with brother Dick and not think of being ill; but he seemed to have lost his power to console her, and his own head ached so that every sob seemed to send a hot dart through his temples, and he only at last sat holding her in his arms in silent misery, for what seemed to him quite a long time, but was really only a few minutes, at the end of which time the door re-opened and the nurse's cheerful, homely voice said.

"Where's my other little one? The doctor said I might have you both. Where's my little Miss Letty?"

And Letty's sobs stopped as if by magic, and her arms left Dick's neck and stretched towards the nurse, as if she had known her all her life.

"May I be ill, too, with Syby?" she asked.

And the nurse answered cheerfully, "To be sure you may, and get well with Syby, too."

But Letty did not forget Dick, for as she went in, clinging round Nurse Esther's waist with the nurse's arm round her neck, Dick heard her say, "But mayn't Dick come too? poor Dick! and be ill with me and Syby? He don't never like to be away from us."

"Oh, I daresay he will come too by and by; never you mind."

And then the door closed and Dick was left still sitting on the stairs outside resting his head in his hands, feeling as if he had not energy to move or even think.

Here Dr. Lee found him a few minutes later when he came up stairs, and he took him down and made him eat and drink something, which Dick did in a listless, mechanical way, doing just as he was told, and then again at the doctor's suggestion, he went up to the comfortable bed-room that had been prepared for him, and, hardly noticing the comfort of his surroundings, threw himself on the bed and fell into a heavy, dreamless sleep.

He must have slept for some hours, for when he woke the crimson, level rays of the sunset were coming in through the window and falling full on a picture that was hung over the bed, and Dick's waking eyes fixed themselves on this picture with a strange sort of confused wonder. How had that picture found its way from the old dressing case and into that wide mounting and carved ebony frame? It used to be framed with pearls, he said to himself, in the dreamy half-waking, and then all at once the face,

that was so like Letty's, woke him with a start to the consciousness of the present and of Letty and Sybil, and he flung himself off the bed and stood looking round, giddy and confused, listening for any sounds from the next room, where Letty had chosen to be "ill too with Syby," and quite forgot the strangeness, that over the bed in Tip Cat's room hung the portrait of his own young mother, smiling, in all her girlish grace and sweetness, as she had smiled from the circle of pearls of which he had robbed her for the little ones' sake.

Some one must have been into the room while he slept, for a bath had been prepared for him and clean linen laid out, suggestive of old times when Jenkins used to be proud to valet his young master, and Dick felt more like his old self when he had bathed and changed his clothes; and just as he was ready, the doctor knocked at the door and came in.

"Well," he said, "you look pounds better for your nap. I've just come in again to see the little girls. I don't think if I were you I would go in just now; they have a first-rate nurse, and she'll do all she can for them, and seeing you may upset them, for little Miss Letty's light-headed."

There was something in his tone that made Dick

turn sharply and look into his face. "Are they very bad?" he said. "Do you think they will not get well?"

The doctor turned away to avoid the eager questioning of Dick's terrified eyes, which would not allow of any evasion as long as they met the doctor's.

"Oh! we won't give up hope," he said; "but they are delicate children. I would not go in if I were you."

But the words were not out of his lips before Dick had opened the door of the sick room and gone in. Not go to them? Keep away? Why, it was only a few minutes ago he had heard Letty's little voice say, "He don't never like to be away from us;" and if they were going to die, surely he must go with them as far as he could, and hold their little hands in death's darkness as he had so often done when night came on and the candles were not lighted, and childish terrors, real or assumed, filled the little ones' minds. If they were going down into that cold river, surely they would want him to help them. Ah, why could he not carry them both over in his arms, as he had so often done across the brooks and streams round Slowmill, so that they should all reach that

other side safely together? Ah, that other side! If they were going this long journey, surely they must want brother Dick to see them off and say good-bye. Ah, what a world of good-byes this was!

As he opened the door he heard Letty's voice talking quick and eagerly; but he did not need to look at the hot, flushed face and bright, restless eyes, or even to hear the words she said, to know that it was the talk of delirium.

Sybil lay still, unnaturally still, Dick thought, who had seen her tossing and turning, never quiet for five minutes together for days. In the dim light of the room, for the sun had set by now, the child's face looked ghastly white and set, and the bed-clothes seemed to fall in those motionless, sculpture-like, solemn folds as they do over the dead.

Dick turned with a sick heart to the other bed. Here, at any rate, there was life. The nurse was at Letty's side, trying to sooth her excitement and keep the clothes over her, but she drew back as Dick approached, and gave up her place to him.

"She has been asking for you," she said, "and I told her you were asleep."

"You should have called me at once," he said quite sharply. "You must always send for me directly

if they want me and I am not in the room. Here I am, Letty; do you want brother Dick?"

"Yes, I want Dick," Letty said; "but he's asleep. Poor Dick! he's tired and gone to sleep. Hush, you mustn't wake him. He'll come when he wakes. It's Dick I want," went on the poor, little, thick voice, while those great, bright, unrecognising eyes looked into Dick's face, and the little, burning hands pushed him feebly away. "I don't want nobody but Dick, and he's asleep. Go away, please; I want Dick."

"She does not know me," said poor Dick, turning away with a sob.

CHAPTER XXI.

POOR DICK.

It was not very long, as Dr. Lee had thought, before he had another patient at Tipton Farm. That evening, as Dick sat down stairs with Tip Cat, smoking and listening for any movement in the room above, a messenger from the town brought up a letter that had come to Mr. Burgess's for Dick. It bore a heavy, black edge, and the writing was Uncle Tom's.

The whole world seemed edged with black to Dick just then, and he opened it and glanced through the contents, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, that his two little cousins should both be dead, and their mother nearly out of her mind with despair, and as for Uncle Tom's really heart-felt words of regret for all that had passed between him and Dick and the little girls, and his acknowledgment that he

had acted neither justly nor generously by them, and his assurances that things should be very different, if they would come back to London and let bygones be bygones, Dick read them through with indifference, as something in which he had no concern, something that was ages too late to do any good.

Even the almost illegible words scrawled at the bottom in Aunt Maria's writing, "Forgive me, Dick," hardly moved his dulled feelings even to pity. He had said, when last they met at Sandyshore, "if any harm happened to the children, I could never forgive you," but now the grievous harm had happened, the aching in his head and heart seemed to leave no room for anger against the cause of it, or for active forgiveness.

"No bad news, I hope," Tip Cat said as he laid down the letter. He felt very constrained in Dick's company, having been for years unused to the society of his equals, and being, moreover, troubled and embarrassed by Dick's gratitude; and having his heart full of sorrow and liking for the young fellow, who every moment by some look or tone or movement recalled the dead mother, even more than little Letty, whose face actually more closely resembled her. He wanted to tell Dick about his mother and explain to

him that anything he could do for his dead love's children (and the most he could do seemed infinitely little) was such a relief and happiness to his own heart, that the gratitude should be all on his side, but he did not know how to begin, and conversation on indifferent matters languished and easily dropped into silence. "No bad news, I hope?" Tip Cat said, when the letter came, and Dick answered, "Oh, no, not at all, thank you," as he laid the letter down, and then remembered himself. "Yes—that is, very bad news for my uncle and aunt; they have lost both their little girls."

"Have they any others?"

"No, there were only those two, Ellen and Grace."

"Bad job!" said Tip Cat.

"Yes, they're terribly cut up. They want us to go back to London, but I must write and tell them it's too late. If he'd written a month ago, we might have gone, and it might have saved the children, but now," Dick went on with such a dreary look of misery in his eyes, that Tip Cat's heart ached to see it, "I couldn't go without the children; go back just as if nothing had happened, and be rich and comfortable, and all that, without Letty and Sybil."

Tip Cat said nothing, but there was something sym-

pathetic in his strange, light eyes that encouraged Dick to go and pour out some of the trouble that was weighing on his heart, only, as he talked, strange confusions crept in, names that Tip Cat had never heard before, Kathie Dumbleton's among the number.

"Have I been talking nonsense?" Dick said, suddenly pulling himself up. "My head feels so funny and confused. I think I'll go up and see how they're getting on."

But as he rose to go he turned so giddy, that he had to catch at the back of a chair, to keep himself from falling.

"Hullo!" he said, "what's wrong with me?"

He stood a minute, and then made a second effort; but this time Tip Cat caught him, and landed him safely in a chair.

"I feel awfully queer," he said; "I wonder if I'm going to be ill? I say!" he went on, quickly, holding his head in both hands, as if he were trying to keep back the deadly giddiness for a minute to speak plainly, "it will be a horrid bother for you, and I'm awfully sorry for you; but if I'm ill, you'd better write and let Uncle Tom know. There's his letter with the address, and he ought to see after the fune-

rals, you know—and oh!" said Dick, "if it wasn't such a bother for you, when you've been so kind already, it seems just the very best thing that we should all of us go together—over," he went on, his voice getting lower and more indistinct, "to the other side."

And then he fell forward against Tip Cat, who took him in his great, strong arms and carried him up-stairs with such a loving, tender care, as if it might have been Letty herself of long ago come to claim his promise.

For many days Dick lay between life and death, and so near death sometimes, that Dr. Lee was fain to give up the battle; and he always maintained that it was nothing but Tip Cat's unwearied nursing that saved Dick's life, for Tip Cat was one of those exceptional born nurses of whom I have spoken before—never sleeping, nor wearying, nor despairing; and Ridge was as invaluable outside the sick-room as Tip Cat was in it, having everything that was wanted ready punctually to a second, without any noise or bustle, or slamming doors, or scolding voices. And now and then Nurse Esther sat by Dick's bedside; but this was not often, for Tip Cat was jealous of his rights, and seemed above the considerations

of rest and food, that are so necessary for mortals generally.

When Dick first came back to dim, indistinct consciousness, the first thing he noticed, as he had done after his nap that first afternoon, was the picture on the wall above the bed; but he was too weak to think or wonder about it, and only lay watching it in that strange, dead calm of utter prostration.

It also seemed to him natural, and he did not wonder that Tip Cat should be always at his side, ready to raise him or to shift his pillows, or to give him some drink; he had got used to that even in his unconscious fever and delirium, and Tip Cat seemed to know without a word what he wanted, and to be able to do it just right.

There seemed no measure of time to Dick just then; sometimes it was dark, with the shaded lamp burning on the table; sometimes there was light coming from the window; but night and day seemed melted together in a strange, vague way, as undefined as the furniture in the room, or the faces that came now and then to the side of his bed.

But gradually things began to get more distinct, and his mind grew slowly to assert itself, and memory began weaving the woolly past into shape, and Tip

Cat noticed a new look in Dick's eyes as they followed him about the room. There was a question in them, and Tip Cat longed to answer it, only he did not feel sure how much Dick remembered, or how much it might be safe to tell him. But presently the question came to the lips that had been so silent since the wild, constant talk of delirium had ceased.

"Have I been ill long?" so low that only a mother or Tip Cat would have heard the words.

"Three weeks to day."

"So long?" He said no more after that but lay so still with his eyes closed that Tip Cat thought he was asleep, till he saw two tears force their way between the closed lids and roll down the white, hollow cheeks.

Three weeks! they were all to have gone together and the little ones had to go alone into all the strangeness of the other side, without brother Dick. If he might only have gone first, just to show them that there was not so much to be frightened at after all! And they were such frightened little things, especially Letty, and they had to go without him. It did seem hard!

He was worse that night, more feverish and a little

light-headed again, repeating that he must go, he must go—the children were waiting for him. But after this relapse he steadily improved, gaining a little strength every day, sleeping a little better, able to take nourishment more easily. But as he grew stronger, he became more irritable and impatient—a sure sign, Dr. Lee declared, of approaching convalescence; but Tip Cat thought there was another cause.

It was after Dr. Lee's visits that he was the most gloomy and out of temper, especially when that gentleman assumed the cheerful, rousing manner that was so effective sometimes with morbid patients, and assured him that he was ever so much better and would soon be eating his mutton-chop and walking his six miles a day again.

"Why does he come here telling a pack of lies?" Dick asked angrily one day. "Does he think I'm a nervous woman and afraid of the truth?"

Dick seemed to watch grudgingly his own improvement, resenting the notion that he had slept soundly, and denying quite fiercely the suggestion that he was hungry. He tried to think himself as helpless as ever, and ignored, as much as he could, the fact that he could raise and move himself better and more easily every day.

It was not only the fractiousness of convalescence, Tip Cat felt sure, but something deeper-rooted.

One day, as Dick lay with that settled look of gloom on his face, Tip Cat offered to read him something, and Dick drew out from under his pillow a little, old prayer book, that had belonged to his mother. It had been sent home after she died, and Dick had always kept it with him, and it had been in his pocket the night he was taken ill, and Tip Cat had found it there, and had put it on the table by the bedside, and from there it had been taken by Dick one restless, weary night, and he had slept with his cheek resting against it, as if the worn, brown cover conveyed some mother's comforting to him.

Now he put it in Tip Cat's hand, who took it reverently, for traced in pale ink in the beginning was the name that was written on his heart in living letters of love. There were some rose leaves pressed between the pages, rose leaves that he would have loved to think had been placed there by his dead love's hands, but they were too fresh for that, for not three months ago they had been blooming in the gardens of Tipton Grange, sweet and fragrant under the eyes of two young lovers.

"Read," said Dick. And Tip Cat read where

he opened, a psalm, some prayers, a parable ; and then there was silence, for his heart was so full of his old love that he had almost forgotten Dick till he spoke. " Tip Cat, do you think I am going to get well ? "

There was an eagerness in his voice that might have shown the longing for life that is so strong in most people.

" Yes, thank God, I do."

" But why should I ? What can I do ? I've made such a shocking mess of it and I haven't the heart to try again, and all by myself too ! all by myself, without the little ones—without little Letty and Sybil ! "

His voice was very weak and uncertain yet, and it kept breaking and choking with sobs that he was not strong enough to suppress, though he struggled manfully, swallowing the sobs, dashing away the hot tears, grasping and twisting the bed-clothes in his hands, in his strong wrestling with the emotion that overpowered him. Tip Cat was watching him with a troubled, puzzled, anxious look at first ; but, by degrees, a light seemed to break on him and clear up all the perplexity in his eyes, and then he tried several times to interrupt Dick with some eager

words of consolation or explanation ; but Dick gave no heed, for what words could comfort him under this heavy burden of life without his little sisters, and presently Tip Cat got up and went away.

Dick hardly noticed that he had gone ; but, by and by, as his agitation quieted down, the silence of the room and of the whole house struck on him painfully. The blind was up, and through the window he could see the yellow leaves of a lime tree, dropping, dropping through the damp, misty air. The closing of a door in a distant part of the house and a voice caught his ear, and set him suddenly listening, raised on his elbow, with a beating heart and held breath, but he dropped back again in a moment with a groan, for what ear, however keen and loving, can hear voices from beyond the grave ? And as far as those dear, young voices were concerned, Dick knew his life must go silent till his death. Where had they laid them ? Who stood by when their last bedtime came ? How they used to cling about him when they said good night, and make him promise, " ever so faithful," to come and see them after they were in bed, and how often when he came, for he always kept that promise, they were both asleep in that rosy, happy, light sleep of childhood, that is as

different to manhood's heavy, weary slumber as a midsummer night, full of soft starlight and dewy fragrance, to the cold, black bitterness of winter.

Again a sound in the distance startled him ; but this time he would not be deceived ; he drew up the bed-clothes over eyes and ears, and tried to court sleep with that set determination which is the surest way of driving that coy visitor away.

But if he did not succeed in sleeping, he did in closing his ears to outside sounds, for the door opened without his hearing it, and some one came to the side of the bed and laid something at his side, something that disentangled itself from the great knitted shawl in which it was wrapped, and pulled down the clothes from Dick's unwilling face with hands that were warm, living flesh and blood, though as thin and white as flesh and blood could be, and pressed a soft, little cheek against Dick's saying, in Letty's sweet, little voice, " Make room for me, Dick, for Sybil wants to come too." And there was Sybil jumping out of Tip Cat's arms on to the bed, with that queer, little chuckle of satisfaction which Dick knew so well, and with nearly as much life and bright energy and brisk enjoyment as ever.

" It was all that fool of a doctor," said Tip Cat, a

few minutes later, sitting at the end of the bed, with tears in his light eyes rather dimming the pleasing sight of three heads on Dick's pillow, where one had lain so long alone, and four arms twined so tightly round Dick's neck that any one else might well have cried for mercy in the fear of suffocation. "It was that idiot Lee; he said we must not mention the children because you were always raving about them in your delirium, and he had them moved to the other end of the house, so that you should not hear a sound. And I was a bigger fool than he was," went on Tip Cat, "because I knew he was wrong all along, and hadn't wit enough to snap my fingers in his face."

CHAPTER XXII.

GETTING WELL.

After all, Dick came to the conclusion, it is very pleasant getting well, and the world is very beautiful, and life has a good many bright days even for poor fellows who cannot marry their lady loves, and who have to work hard for their livings. The very idea of work even is not unpleasant when head and hands are getting stronger every day, and little active impulses and energies make themselves felt, that have lain dormant through fever and weakness; not immediate work perhaps, for it is still pleasant to lie on the sofa in that sunny bow window and be petted and waited on by Tip Cat and Ridge and Nurse Esther and Sybil; for Letty needs almost more petting and waiting on than Dick, being still a very transparent, little shadow.

They are no longer at Tipton Farm, but at Torquay, and it is the end of October, though it might

be August to judge from the warm sunshine pouring in at the window, and the bright blue of the bay, and the rich green that clothes the slopes, and only here and there a patch of red and russet foliage betrays the fact that winter is near. The window is open and Kaiser sits outside on the balcony in dignified ugliness, blinking in the sun and watching the people mounting the hill to the church above, from whence the sound of a pleasantly-toned bell is calling to afternoon service.

Dick is alone with the children, for Tip Cat is out, and Nurse and Ridge are among the groups of people climbing the hill, watched by Kaiser, and by Sybil too, from the window. Ridge and the nurse are great friends by this time, all the greater for their mutual distrust at first; and Ridge has grown quite young again in her society, and smartens himself up and looks quite soldierly and imposing, and the little girls have made a plan that Ridge and nurse shall marry and live in the lodge at Tipton Grange, instead of that cross, old woman in spectacles, who threw stones at Kaiser because he went after her cat.

Nurse listens to these arrangements with a smile, and tells them not to talk such rubbish, and that Ridge is old enough to be her grandfather, but owns,

when much pressed, that he is still a fine man, and has more notion of what he's about than half the young men one meets.

Dick had been reading to the children out of their mother's Prayer Book, after which followed an ineffectual search on Letty and Sybil's part in the Bible for the story of "Beauty and the Beast," which they both stoutly maintained was to be found there. Dick was much puzzled as to what could have given rise to this idea, but when a Bible with an Apocrypha was found, he was able to trace it to "Bel and the Dragon," the name of which certainly sounded promising, but which was very disappointing on further examination.

This rather exhausted their ardor of Biblical research, and Sybil remembered that it must be quite time for Letty and Dick to take their medicine. Nurse Esther having intrusted her with the charge of administering it. She had already twice tried to persuade Dick that the proper time had arrived, and had shaken the bottle so vigorously that its contents were more than half froth, and had done a good deal of scrutinising the medicine glass with one eye shut, to master the exact line to which the medicine was to reach.

Now, as they were within about half an hour of the right time, Dick agreed to take the medicine, and Sybil at once assumed the most important and dignified airs, which Letty perhaps a little bit resented, as she would have loved to do the same, but which Dick encouraged by pretending extreme disgust and horror of the medicine, intreating piteously to be allowed to leave it or at any rate to have a piece of sugar to take the taste out of his mouth, and at last swallowing it with such dreadful grimaces, that Sybil was obliged to taste it herself to see if it really were so bad, and then to fetch lumps of sugar for the whole party, Kaiser included, to console them.

She found it rather dull after this excitement was over, but remembered that Nurse Esther always washed the medicine glass after it was used, so went bustling off to do it, coming back after a long time, with the front of her frock rather damp and her fingers very cold and pink—results which such a small matter as the washing of one medicine glass seemed hardly sufficient to account for.

Meanwhile Dick and Letty were having a quiet, little talk by themselves.

"Dick, shall we always live with Tip Cat now?"

"Oh no, Letty; why should we?"

"Nurse said she thought we should, and so did Ridge; they were talking about it yesterday."

Her questions set Dick off thinking; but again Letty's voice broke in on his thoughts.

"Dick, I suppose we sha'n't go and live with Aunt Maria, shall we, now she hasn't got Ellen and Grace? And, Dick, ought I always to say poor Ellen and poor Grace when I speak of them? Nurse and Martha always did when any one was dead, and so did Mrs. Tysoe."

"No, Letty. Nurse and Martha don't think when they talk like that. Do you know, little Letty, when I was so ill, I thought that you and Sybil were both dead; but I never once thought of you as poor Letty or poor Sybil, but happy, little Letty and Sybil, and poor, poor Dick, to have to live without them!"

Need I say that by this time Letty was on Dick's sofa, as if the distance between the armchair and the sofa might be enough to make Dick poor.

"And don't you remember," Dick went on, "how Ellen looked that day we saw her at Sandyshore? how ill and tired and sad she seemed, not able to run about or be happy or out of pain for a minute?

She was poor Ellen then, but that is all changed now." He was thinking to himself though he would not say it to her, that, apart from her illness and suffering, she would still have been poor Ellen, brought up to be hard, and cold, and calculating, as might so well have happened.

"Shall we go and live with Aunt Maria?" There was rather a dreary, little tone in the voice that asked the question.

"Should you like to, Letty?"

For all answer the arm tightened round his neck.

"Then, I suppose," said Letty, trying to speak very cheerfully, but with a little inward shrinking, like a young bird peeping out at a cold world from under his mother's wing, "that we shall go back to Mrs. Ricketts?"

"No, Letty; never again, my little one."

"Then do you think we could really and truly afford to live at Mrs. Tysoe's? Do you know, Dick, Mr. Tysoe came ever so many times to ask how we were, and brought us all sorts of things we weren't allowed to have—sweets and preserved ginger and candied peel—and Mrs. Tysoe came up once in the cart, and was so angry because she was not let in to see us? But there's the new lodger, Dick—the travel-

ler, you know—perhaps he would not like to turn out and let us have the rooms again, and what shall we do then ?"

Dick was hardly listening to Letty's words, for her questions had set his mind so busily to work on what would indeed be the best plan for the future. Certainly any arrangement like that of living at the Ricketts' was quite out of the question, and even the Tysoes', if it was to be had, he felt would hardly be the place for that very fragile, little sister of his. And, besides, how did he know that Mr. Burgess's situation would still be open to him, or if he would have to seek another elsewhere ? Surely Uncle Tom would be willing now (and it was only right and proper that he should do so) to provide for the children ; "And as for me," thought Dick, "when I'm all right again——"

But just as Dick got so far in his meditations Tip Cat came in, a little gruff at finding the window still open and the fire almost out, for the sun had set, and even at Torquay the end of October is not like August after sunset.

But by and by, when the windows were shut and the curtains drawn and the sofa wheeled round to the fire, which had woke up to fill the room with

warmth and ruddy light, Tip Cat, who had Letty in his arms, started the very subject the two had been discussing before he came in.

"How would you like, Letty, to live at Tipton Grange?"

"At Tipton Grange, with Mrs. Vivian and Kathie Dumbleton?"

"No; at Tipton Grange with me."

He gave a little, quick look across at Dick to see if he were listening, and then went on talking to Letty and to Sybil, who came to sit on a stool at his feet.

"You see, Mrs. Vivian's lease is up next year, and she wants to renew it. It's a large house, you know, Letty, too large for me and Ridge, we should lose one another in it, and spend all our lives trying to find one another again. But it would be just the right size for you and me and Sybil and Dick, and we should want a few servants to wait on us, and perhaps a governess or so— Oh! I don't mean, of course, for you and Sybil, but for me and Dick; and then, perhaps, when Dick comes home from Oxford, he'll bring friends with him, and they will help to fill the place, and then, of course, you and Sybil will ask your friends——"

"Oh yes!" burst in Sybil, "there's the Tysoes.

I know they'd like to come, for Mr. Tysoe said he'd never once been in at the front door."

"Yes, to be sure, the Tysoes," went on Tip Cat, still with half an eye on Dick's face, the expression of which he could not quite make out, though he saw his hands, which had grown so thin and white in his illness, clench and unclench nervously, as he listened. "Do you think you could be happy there with me? Stop a bit, Dick! Don't be in a hurry, lad!" For Dick had half raised himself from the sofa, with vehement words on his lips. "I must have my say first, and tell you why I have a sort of right to you and Letty and Sybil."

And then he told him of his love for their mother, and of that promise made years ago under the golden chestnut tree in the vicarage garden, a promise that seemed to have fallen as dead as those bright autumn leaves; forgotten as completely as last year's leaves when the buds came out in May, the buds of her great love for another; buried with that dear dust to dust in that far away grave in India. Till suddenly, when least he looked for it, he had been reminded of this promise by Letty's eyes looking up at him from her child's face among the bushes by the plank bridge, and having been slow, fool that he

was! to hear his dead lady's voice, he had let it pass till it came clear and plain beyond all mistaking, in poor, little Letty's cry for help in their trouble. "And now," he said, "do you think I can let you go again?"

"You are so good," Dick said; his voice was trembling, he was not very strong yet, and it was as much as he could do to keep the tears back from his eyes, and to steady his uncertain voice. "You have been so good to us already that it seems a ridiculous insult to thank you for what is quite beyond all thanks. You gave us back our lives, you know. Oh yes! I know, I am not ungrateful, but don't you see, it was *through* you, all through you."

Letty and Sybil had been wafted somehow out of the room by nurse Esther to tea, and Dick and Tip Cat were alone just now.

"Don't you think," went on Dick, getting more indistinct and chokey every minute, "that you have more than fulfilled your promise to my mother without being bothered with us any more?"

"Come now," said Tip Cat, "do you think that I can just go back to Tipton Farm and settle down with Ridge and Kaiser as if nothing had happened? I don't believe Ridge would do it," he said, with a

queer look at Dick as the sound of Ridge's voice was heard from the next room evidently taking part in a cheerful tea with the children and nurse Esther; "he has got thoroughly demoralised and so has Kaiser. He would not go with me this afternoon because Sybil held the end of his tail, and the old idiot was too great a gentleman to pull it out of her little hand."

There was silence then for a bit, and Dick lay with great, luminous eyes shining in the firelight and Tip Cat watched him under his thick brows and waited for the words to express the thoughts that he almost seemed to see passing from Dick's brain to the tremulous, eager lips.

At last he spoke. "Tip Cat," he said, "I think my mother would wish you to have the little girls, and I know you'll be good to them; and I've made such a mull of taking care of them that I haven't the pluck to try again; and they wouldn't like to go to Aunt Maria and I shouldn't like them to go either, though I dare say, poor thing, she'd do her best to be kind to them. And if you really will take care of them till I see my way and can get on a bit, and if you'll let me come now and then to see them and you, I'll——" But here Dick broke down altogether,

and Tip Cat leaning across laid his hand on the young fellow's shaking shoulder.

"Dick," he said, "dear as Letty and Sybil are to me, and I love them so that I sometimes wonder if even I could have loved their mother herself better, it is you, lad, Letty's boy, that I love best and that I want most."

CHAPTER XXIII.

DICK'S OBSTINACY.

DURING the fortnight that followed that Sunday, Tip Cat discovered a quality in Dick which he had not hitherto recognised, that quality which the possessor calls firmness and other people obstinacy, the display of which so exasperated Tip Cat, that he was heard more than once to declare that he was an obstinate, pig-headed, young fool, and he swallowed down such a lot of strong language on account of the children's presence, that he felt seriously uncomfortable from suppressed wrath.

The fact was that nothing would induce Dick to agree to Tip Cat's plan for the future as far as he himself was concerned. He accepted with the deepest gratitude Tip Cat's proposal for the little girls, but for himself he declared that, when he was well, he should look out for another situation, if Mr. Burgess's was not to be had, and make another, and he hoped a more successful, effort to earn his living.

It was in vain that Tip Cat talked and argued till he was hoarse and very angry; Dick listened to all he had to say with the greatest outward submission but without budging an inch from his determination, and the conversations almost always ended with warm expressions of gratitude on Dick's part and an explosion of wrath on the part of Tip Cat.

Tip Cat tried every persuasion in his power; painted Dick's return to Oxford among all his old friends, taking up again the pleasant, jolly, old life just where it had been broken off; his home at Tipton Grange with the two little girls, where he could entertain his friends; of the hunters he should have, and the pheasant shooting that should be kept for him, and the moor in Scotland that they would take, and the yacht at Cowes that might make a pleasant change, and, if he must have something to do, he might be called to the bar or he might stand for the county if he had any fancy that way; did he think the estates had been nursing up all these years for nothing?

But Dick only smiled and shook his head and sternly prevented his mind from resting even for five minutes on such glittering prospects.

And then Tip Cat declared that it would be months

before Dick would be strong enough to do anything, and drew such a gloomy picture of the probable state of his health for the rest of his life, that Dick threatened to show his strength by carrying Tip Cat himself round the room, and would have attempted it, if he had not laughed himself into too hopeless a state of exhaustion.

Then Tip Caf set Letty and Sybil at him, and this was no laughing affair, for two very tearful faces came to Tip Cat's door after their interview with Dick, to say that Dick was always right, and they had promised never to try and persuade him to do anything else.

Then Tip Cat tried a desperate expedient and regretted it bitterly. He said that, on consideration, he thought it would not be right to take the little girls without Dick, and that as Dick so entirely declined his proposal, perhaps it would be better to give up the whole plan and let Dick make some other arrangement for his little sisters.

At first he thought this thrust had told, for Dick sat silent and still, and his face was very white; but he turned Tip Cat's weapons on him when he answered that he, too, had been thinking the matter over very seriously, and he thought that, perhaps, Tip Cat

was right, for that Aunt Maria, in her great trouble and bereavement, had expressed a great wish to have the little girls with her, and that it might be their duty to consider her before making other plans.

Tip Cat was furious and Letty and Sybil in the depths of woe, but patient and resigned to do just what Dick thought right; but Letty had such a feverish night in consequence, and was so ill and prostrate next day, that Tip Cat was reduced to the most abject submission, and entreated Dick to make what arrangements he pleased, but never even to suggest the idea of the children going anywhere but into his care; as if, indeed, Dick had been the first to propose the plan.

Dick made rather an ungenerous use of this victory, for he wrote that very day to Mr. Burgess to know if the situation was still vacant, and if he would allow him to return to his work in a month's time, and Tip Cat looked on grimly while the letter was being written and despatched, and did not dare to say a word of expostulation on account of the little, white face on the sofa which grew tremulous at the least sign of a discussion.

For two days Tip Cat comforted himself and crowed a little over Dick with the idea that Mr. Bur-

gess must certainly have filled Dick's place by this time, and no doubt much more to his satisfaction, as Dick always represented, and firmly believed, that he had made a very poor job of it at Mr. Burgess's, and given a lot of trouble by his inefficiency. But the next day a letter came that quite touched Dick by its kindness, and to a corresponding degree irritated Tip Cat, saying that Mr. Burgess much regretted Mr. Lucas' illness, and should be very glad if he would return to his office when his health was quite re-established, also offering him a slight addition to his salary, and expressing his satisfaction with the manner in which he had discharged his duties while he had been there.

Indeed, Mr. Burgess had found it a very different matter when Mr. Macintosh undertook Dick's duties, and even Mr. Lupton had been obliged grudgingly to confess, that things had gone better when Dick was there, and that they might have a worse clerk than he was.

Tip Cat's last hope now seemed to have come to the ground, and he was sitting gloomily on one of the seats under the cliff near the sea wall, pondering how best he might alleviate this wilful young fellow's life without offending the pride that he liked him all

the better for possessing, when his eye was caught by the face of a girl sitting in a carriage just then drawn up by the pavement opposite to him. The other occupant of the carriage was talking to a gentleman standing on the other side, so he could not see her face, but the girl was not apparently interested in the conversation, but was leaning back with her face turned towards Tip Cat and her eyes gazing dreamily along the sunny roadway as if her thoughts (and they were sad ones) were far away.

Tip Cat did not often notice faces, least of all ladies' faces; but this one attracted him, for it was unusually sweet, and something in the look of the eyes reminded him of Dick, and, through Dick, of the Letty of long ago. But while he was looking at her the other lady ended her conversation and turned, and, as her eye met Tip Cat's, she gave a smile of recognition, and bowed as the carriage drove off.

Who was it? Tip Cat wondered; but his circle of lady friends was not so large that he could wonder long, and, by the time his hat was on again, he remembered that it was Mrs. Vivian.

That evening, as he was sitting by while the children played, half reading the paper and half

listening to the children's talk, he heard a name several times repeated that sounded to him very familiar, and yet he could not clearly remember why he knew it so well,

"Kathie Dumbleton," Letty said, had eyes just like the doll, Tip Cat had bought the day before; but Sybil thought hers were darker, and at last they appealed to Tip Cat, as Dick was not there.

"Who is Kathie Dumbleton?" he asked.

"Oh, don't you know? She lives with Mrs. Vivian, at Tipton Grange; and we went to tea with her once, and she had a pink frock on and she mended mine, and there were sponge cakes for tea, and peacocks and lots of roses, and she pinned a rose to our frocks, and Dick gave me threepence for mine when it was quite withered."

"Oh-h-h-h!" said Tip Cat.

He remembered now how the name had grown so familiar to him; it was not from the children's prattle, but from a voice in delirium, repeating it over and over again, joined to tender adjectives of love or sad words of farewell. How stupid and slow he had been in putting things together and reading Dick's sad, little love-story! And no doubt that was Kathie Dumbleton who was with Mrs, Vivian that

afternoon, and whose sweet face he had noticed, and perhaps even then her thoughts had been with Dick, as her eyes gazed dreamily away into the distance. If she really cared for Dick, as he had no doubt Dick cared for her, why should they be parted? What reason could there be for that heartbroken farewell that Dick had murmured over and over again in his delirium? "Kathie, my love, my love; goodbye!"

Tip Cat was very silent and thoughtful all that evening, but he noticed how Dick's color flushed up when he came in and the children referred the debated point about the doll's eyes to him, and how after the little ones had gone to bed, he took up the waxen beauty, and looked at the pretty, simpering face with an eager scrutiny, and then pushed it away impatiently, as if he were irritated with it, or himself.

But all the time Tip Cat was hatching a little scheme, and the next afternoon he proceeded to carry it out. He had promised to take Letty and Sybil for a drive that afternoon, but for the first time in the course of their acquaintance, he broke his promise and sent them off with Dick instead, saying that he had some business to do, and, after seeing

them off, he set out himself in the direction of the Imperial Hotel, where an examination of the visitors' list had told him that Mrs. Vivian and her niece were staying.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"FOR MY SAKE."

It required some courage in Tip Cat, apart from the ultimate object of his visit, to pay a call on two ladies, when he had not done such a thing for twenty-five years at the very least; and though, like Ridge, the society of the children had produced a slight improvement in his personal appearance and way of dressing, still, he was a gaunt, remarkable figure, and many turned to look at him with curiosity as he stalked along the streets with his shaggy dog at his heels; and the waiter at the Imperial looked very suspiciously at this most unusual sort of morning caller, who asked for Mrs. Vivian, and he looked rather doubtfully at the card, which had been bought at a stationer's on the way up, and on which the name "Tipton Cathcart" was written in a hand which not even the pin-pointed pen lent at the shop could rob of its bold and rugged character.

But the waiter returned to usher him in with a great increase of alacrity and respect, for Mrs. Vivian had appeared both pleased and surprised at the sight of the name, and had desired the waiter to show the gentleman up forthwith.

It was certainly enough to surprise her, for it was the first time in the whole course of her experience of her strange landlord, now of many years' duration, that he had done anything but avoid her with a pertinacity that bordered on downright rudeness.

"What could he possibly want?" she wondered, and for the first few minutes she could not solve the problem, while he sat very stiff and upright on a settee in the window, twisting his hat round and round in his big hands, and staring out across the lovely, blue bay as if he were intent on watching the brown-sailed fishing boats turning into Brixham Harbor, and only answering, with gruff monosyllables, to her gentle stream of polite nothings about the weather and the scenery.

Once or twice he gave a quick look round the room, but there was no one there but Mrs. Vivian, and though a half-finished sketch and an open color-box lay on the table close by, no Kathie Dumbleton made her appearance on the scene; so there

was no help for it but to plunge into the object of his call without any help from outward circumstances, and this he did, breaking into Mrs. Vivian's enthusiastic expressions of admiration for Anstey's Cove, as if he hardly knew she were speaking.

"You have a niece, I believe?"

"Yes, I have several."

"I mean Kathie Dumbleton,"

"Yes, Miss Dumbleton is now staying with me." She meant the slight stress on the *Miss* to be a reproof to this very rough, almost brutal, old man; but she might have spared herself the trouble, for, if she had spoken of Kathie as her royal highness, he would scarcely have noticed it, so set was he on getting out what he wanted to say.

"There is a young fellow I am much interested in, named Dick Lucas," Tip Cat went on.

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Vivian, with outward indifference, but with a sudden remembrance of that evening in the Grange garden, when Kathie had sobbed out her broken-hearted confession, and of evenings since then, in the dusk or firelight, when the girl's head had lain on her lap, and the young voice had whispered that she never could forget, or care for any one else. But Mrs. Vivian said "In-

deed?" as if she had never heard the name before.

"He is the son of a Colonel Lucas, who died in India, and he has been clerk at Mr. Burgess's at Slowmill for the last six months."

"Really?" murmured Mrs. Vivian; "very creditable to the young man, I'm sure."

"I have reason to believe, madam, that he has formed an attachment for your niece."

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Vivian, with a slight raising of the eyebrows and drawing in of the lips, that might have conveyed, to any one more sensitive than a rhinoceros, the ridiculous presumption of such an attachment; and the utter indifference with which it should be regarded. But Tip Cat continued, "I have the very highest opinion of young Lucas, and I only hope your niece is half good enough for him, but I think she is an uncommonly lucky girl."

Now Mrs. Vivian was not easily provoked, she was fat and comfortable and easy-going, and would have been heartily glad if all the rest of the world had been fat and comfortable and easy-going too; but the reader will allow that Tip Cat's way of treating the subject was enough to disturb the most in-

dolent good-nature, and Mrs. Vivian sat more upright in her arm chair than she had done for many a day, and directed quite a withering glance at the unconscious Tip Cat.

"I think I understood you to say that this young man was a clerk at Burgess's office."

"Yes," said Tip Cat.

"Not a very exalted position—a paid clerk to a country lawyer."

"No one said it was," growled Tip Cat.

"Then do you really mean to say, Mr. Cathcart, that you think that this young man is in a position to propose to my niece, who will come into a good property at her father's death, besides what she already has from her mother?"

"Eh—h—h?" said Tip Cat, turning quite bewildered to look at Mrs. Vivian, whose heightened color and indignant eyes were quite unaccountable to him. He had quite lost sight, had this romantic, old man, of outward circumstances and worldly considerations of wealth and position, and had been thinking only of two young hearts that loved one another, one of which he knew was good and pure and true; and he stared at Mrs. Vivian for a minute, in silence—"looking positively idiotic" that lady

said in describing the scene afterwards—but at last a light seemed to dawn on his mind and a smile on the grave astonishment of his eyes.

"Oh!" he said, "I see! I beg your pardon! You see Tipton Grange estate is considerable, and it will all be Dick Lucas's; and as for settlements and that sort of nonsense, I generally leave such things to the lawyers, but I'll undertake there shall be no grumbling over such trifles."

Mrs. Vivian's breath was fairly taken away, and I think if Tip Cat had looked idiotic the minute before, she must have looked so now, as she sank back with all the stiffness taken out of her backbone and the firmness out of her lips and the fire out of her eyes; only Tip Cat did not care a snap how she looked, for just then his eye caught sight, in the terraced gardens below the window, of a girl's figure walking pensively up and down in the sunshine.

"Is that your niece there?" he said, and hardly waiting for Mrs. Vivian's assent he got up; "then with your permission I will go and speak to her myself. Good day to you." And away he strode, leaving poor Mrs. Vivian quite overcome, and obliged to ring for her maid and give way to a glass of sherry and palpitations brought on by what she at

first called, the brutal, and afterwards, on reflection, the eccentric, behavior of Tip Cat.

Meanwhile, that offender had made his way down stairs and out into the hotel garden, where he found Kathie alone as the sun was getting low in the west; and the two or three invalids who had been crawling up and down the paths had taken flight at the first tint of sunset in the sky, and breath of evening in the air, and had fled for shelter.

Kathie was a little bit startled at the sudden appearance of this strange, uncouth, old man, but she guessed who he was before he spoke, and his voice was softened to something of the same tone that Letty and Sybil knew, as he told her (the old deceiver!) that her aunt had given him leave to come and find her there as he had a few words to say to her.

Curious observers, watching from the hotel windows as the two paced up and down the path while the sunset glowed and faded in the sky, speculated and wondered what the subject of such absorbing interest could be, and what that strange looking, rough, old man could be saying with those pleading movements of the hands and eager eyes, scanning the downcast, troubled face of the girl.

He plunged into his subject without any preface, and began telling her of the interest he felt in Dick Lucas and his little sisters on account of their dead mother. He noticed how the wave of color rushed up into her temples and even to her little ears at the first mention of Dick's name, and went on more hopefully, having been a little damped by his interview with Mrs. Vivian. He told her of Dick's sudden loss of fortune on his grandfather's death, of which she already knew a little, and how bravely he had tried to support himself and his two little sisters, and how illness had come at last to end the pitiful struggle, and how nearly death had followed. He saw the tears start and tremble in her eyes, though she kept them so steadily cast down, and sparkle on her lashes though she made a pretext to pick an ivy leaf on the wall to whisk them away unnoticed. He told her how Dick had slowly recovered and how he (Tip Cat) had set all his heart and hopes on having Dick as his son, as Letty and Sybil were to be his little daughters, and how the obstinate, young fellow had persisted in refusing and had actually arranged to go back to his drudgery at Mr. Burgess's in spite of all persuasions.

"I have tried all the inducements I could think of,"

Tip Cat said, "to make him alter his determination, but it is no good, and as a last resource I have come to you, to ask you to use your influence."

They had come to the end of the path furthest from the hotel, and as he said this they both stopped, and Kathie gave a sudden, startled look into his face and then began stripping the ivy leaf in her hand to pieces with nervous fingers. But Tip Cat had no more to say, he was waiting for her answer, and at last she said very low: "I don't see what I can do in the matter."

"Don't you?" He turned quite fiercely on her and his voice sounded harsh enough now. "Then you don't care for him! Why, do you think, if my love Letty had come to me and said, 'Tip Cat, for my sake!' there is anything in the world I would not have done? Heaven forgive me! I think I would have given my very soul and my hope of immortality!"

She was leaning against the balustrades, with her face turned away and he could only see the outline of her cheek against the crimson of the western sky, and her slender throat drawn up with what seemed to him an air of cold, proud indifference, he could not see the quivering of her lips, or the tumultuous beating of her heart, which had never seemed quite to

regain its calm since that passionate kiss of her young lover's that July evening.

He stood waiting a minute, and then without another word turned and walked away, full of bitter disappointment, and every sound of his heavy footfall on the gravel path seemed to Kathie a clod thrown into the grave of her happiness, buried without hope of resurrection.

Reader, do you know in *Paul and Virginia* the account of Virginia's death? and how she preferred to die rather than cast off the clothing which would have impeded the swimming of the brave sailor who would have saved her, and how this is treated as exquisite and refined modesty? Even as a child it struck me as false sentiment and that, to pervert the words of Scripture, the life is more than raiment. And do you know how many love stories in fiction (fewer, I fancy, in real life) end sadly because the heroine's modesty will not allow a word or look to reveal the love that is breaking her heart? and so two people are made miserable and two lives spoilt. Far be it from me to speak a word against modesty. All honor to it! There cannot be too much of it, but, for pity's sake, let it be real, not false!

But Kathie was not of the stuff those heroines are

made of, for, before Tip Cat had reached the steps at the end of the terrace, she was by his side with her little hand on his arm, and her face turned pleadingly up, more pleading for the tears that filled and overflowed the eyes.

"Tell me," she said, "what I can do? I will do anything."

Did they say Tip Cat was harsh and rough? Did they say his eyes were hard and imperious, and his manner brutal? Ask Kathie Dumbleton how tenderly he took her hand in his, how kindly he smiled down at her, and how gently he spoke. "My dear, trust in me. I will take care of you and not ask you to do anything that I would not ask of a sweet, young daughter of my own."

The watchers from the hotel windows could make neither head nor tail of it, as they watched the little scene, at the end of which they saw Tip Cat lead Kathie away, holding the hand that lay on his arm, and some declared that as they came nearer they could see that Kathie was crying, and when they passed through the hotel and called a fly, and drove off in it together, the interested spectators felt as if it must be some one's duty to go and warn Mrs. Vivian of her niece's goings on.

I do not think that Tip Cat had any very settled plan of action, when he carried Kathie Dumbleton off in this way, and as for Kathie, she had no idea at all of what was going to happen, only as long as Tip Cat held her little hand in his firm grasp, she did not feel very much afraid.

It was nearly dark when the fly stopped and Tip Cat helped her out and led her, still holding her hand in his, into the house and opened the door of a room lighted only by a great, warm fire. At first Kathie thought it was empty, but Tip Cat said, "Dick!" and at his voice some one got up from the sofa at the further end, and came into the firelight.

"Dick, I have brought a visitor to see you." But at these words the poor, little visitor was overwhelmed with a passion of confusion, and clung to Tip Cat's arm as if it were her only safety. She suddenly remembered how last she had parted from this same Dick, how could she look at him? how could she speak to him? What could she say?

And then all at once she looked up and saw such a poor, white-faced Dick, so changed, so gaunt, with such great, hollow eyes and such cropped hair, holding out such thin, wasted hands to her! Was this the proud, young fellow who refused Tip Cat's offers,

and persisted in working his way? how long would he stand the treadmill at Mr. Burgess's and the poor pay and hard living?

In the pity of it she forgot all her shame, and let go of Tip Cat's arm, and put both her hands into Dick's, and, looking up into his eyes, spoke the first words that came into her head, the very words that Tip Cat had told her would have been so powerful with him from the lips of his love. "Oh, Dick, for my sake!"

Reader, do you think Tip Cat had any doubt of his victory after that, even though he stopped to hear no more, but slipped away into the next room and sat watching the lights appearing along the streets and in the houses, and higher up the stars coming so softly, gently out on night's breast?

His heart was as tremulously happy as if the long, empty years had rolled back and he were young again and telling that love, on which death had laid its solemn seal of silence, in Letty's ears and his eyes grew dim as he murmured, "Letty, my love, at last!"

THE END.

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